

# THE HEART'S COUNSEL

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JOHN H. SKRINE



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# The Heart's Counsel

AND

OTHER SERMONS.

BY

Canon JOHN HUNTLEY SKRINE,

WARDEN OF GLENALMOND AND CANON OF ST. NINIAN'S CATHEDRAL, PERTH;

AUTHOR OF "A MEMORY OF EDWARD THRING," "JOAN THE MAID," ETC.

"LET THE COUNSEL OF THINE OWN HEART STAND: FOR THERE IS NO MAN MORE FAITHFUL UNTO THEE THAN IT.

"FOR A MAN'S MIND IS SOMETIME WONT TO TELL HIM MORE THAN SEVEN WATCHMEN, THAT SIT ABOVE IN AN HIGH TOWER."

*Ecclesiasticus xxxvii. 13, 14.*

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A FATHER IN GOD :


GEORGE HOWARD WILKINSON,

LORD BISHOP OF ST. ANDREWS, DUNKELD AND DUNBLANE.

---

Counsellor of a hundred hearts,  
How names itself my page with thee,  
If, where the doubter's pathway parts,  
Self-counsellor the heart must be ?

But thou hast leaned an ear, and heard  
The All-Diviner's music fine :  
And, near thee, by some echo stirred,  
A heart may hear herself divine.



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## I.

# Fatalism and Faith.

*(First Sunday in Advent.)*

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2 KINGS XVIII. 34.

"Where are the gods of Hamath, and of Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah?"



THE world is to know one true Advent; as we think, a late one. Meanwhile it is likely to know many false Advents. On the far horizon "God makes Himself an awful rose of dawn," but it broadens and deepens slowly, ah! so slowly; and between it and us there rise from time to time the signs and portents as of some other coming. There is a shaking of the powers of Heaven, there is seen the sign of some other than the Son of God, and a pomp not of Christ seems coming in clouds of doom; some kingdom of another name than the one only Name domineers over the present, claims the future as its own, and declares itself the world's fulfilment. One time it is the coarse Advent of a masterful universal empire, sweeping contemptuously forward to drown in the common deluge the last island rock of a spiritual commonwealth. Another time it is the subtle Advent of a confident philosophy, which has overrun, one by one, the domains of thought, and now gathers its first battalions towards the foot of Belief's very stronghold, while its heralds parley con-



descendingly with the garrison, pointing a finger back at the spoils and captives, and asking, "Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah? What province has not been annexed to the empire of Criticism? Why is the City of Faith to be the sole exception to a conquest which is universal?"

The herald of Sennacherib knew his business well. The shock of battering-ram upon the gate could hardly have been more daunting to the shivering lines of citizens on the battlements than this majestic parade of accomplished triumphs. It overawed the imagination. Each camping ground of the Assyrian has been a surrendered city. Why should not we, the last, be as the rest? May not what he says be true, that he is Heaven's favourite, has a mission to subdue the nations, is the "rod of God's anger"?

The arts of Rabshakeh have been learnt by his successors. When they threaten siege to the daughter of Zion in her later stronghold of the Christian Faith they use his devices. "Modern criticism," urge the patronizing ambassadors of the new aggressive world-power, "has had an unbroken career of conquest; she has made herself mistress, progressively but surely, of every field of fact, and wrested provinces from theology. From this and that theory of Biblical interpretation and inspiration, of civil government, of education, she has dislodged the garrisons of the Faith. 'Where are the gods of Hamath and of Arpad?' The old realms, from which she has driven theology, criticism is already reconstituting under new creeds and even new worships of her own. The most cultivated nations are the least Christian, and where Christian belief is most, it is least among the intelligent; the march of knowledge is the retreat of faith; the progressive disenchantment of religion

is a large world-process; you who resist will be found fighting, not indeed against God, but against a no less invincible Fate."

So far Rabshakeh. Among the men who sit on the wall he has listeners who are dangerously open to such an appeal. There is prevalent now a condition of mind which we may call Fatalism—Fatalism of the passive, not the militant kind (for there are both)—a readiness to acknowledge Fate as supreme over the human will, and to abandon resistance in favour of a supposed necessity. But the doctrine of Fatalism is professed under a new nomenclature. The Fate to which a man strikes his flag nowadays is renamed *Tendency*. Modern culture has taught him to believe in the conquering power of a Tendency; it has given him a wide horizon, and he views the larger facts as exhibitions of wide-reaching laws, not as isolated occurrences of this time or that country, but as long prepared movements acting on a world-wide scale, and therefore of a volume and momentum not resistible by isolated efforts. So one man is overawed by one, another by another tendency. This man by the advancing shadow of Democracy, which is said to be like the grave, and to give nothing back; that man by a current asserted to be setting towards the Disestablishment of Churches; a third by the growth of Individualism and resistance to authority. Whatever can describe itself as a tendency is to some minds the decree of fate, and surrender is made to it.

It is for others, and in other places, to point out what mischiefs threaten the State and social life from this readiness to prostrate the will before a supposed drift of fate. Our concern is to note what unhappy work this yielding mood may do in the affairs of religion.

It is said that the battle of beliefs is fought now-a-days with gentler weapons—no longer with those of persecution, but with those of reason. But in all battles, physical or spiritual, the day is often carried not by the weapons at all, or by the preponderance of actual force, but by impression. And in the battle of belief it may be doubted whether it is reason, if we mean the bare intellectual element, which turns the scale in the minds of the multitude. Imagination plays a larger part; their conclusions are more emotional than logical. Now the special stress applied to the minds of the average cultivated believer by modern criticism is the stress of an imaginative terror. What is going on in the minds of many a young man or woman is of this kind. "The reasons for my belief," he says, "are perhaps sufficient: but how is it these destructive principles keep coming in and on, and gaining position after position: so that in society, what was discreditable heresy some years back is now a venial latitude, and men can now proclaim on the housetop what lately they could only whisper in the ear? Have my fathers kept their faith only because there had not been time for doubt to reach them, because there were regions of fact which were still 'dark continents,' homes of mystery, twilights not yet searched out by the intense lamp of science? Is belief being penned back into ever narrowing limits, like barbarians into permitted reserves, there to exist on sufferance? Whole classes in cultured nations have swung over to the agnostic life. Of my own friends this and that have openly cut cable, or silently drifted from their moorings by my side. Where will it stop? Is it only a question of time? If so, had I not better go over at once, and surrender by choice, with the honours of the intellect?"

Such are the thoughts of many of the men who sit on the wall. What is the counter-charm to this fascination of imaginative terror? It is twofold, intellectual and moral.

First, intellectually, Fatalism is an *unreasonable* attitude of mind. It assumes that a tendency must be continuously and indefinitely realized. Now that is unreasonable. Where does anyone find such a law? Where—from one end of creation to the other? Not in the grand cosmic scheme. There all is balance, interchange, compensation, periodicity, tendency eternally defeated by counter-tendency. The planets are ever drawn sunward and ever kept away, the tides swing shoreward and again seaward. Not, again, in organic life, which is an equilibrium everlastingly effected between tendencies from without which are repulsed by tendencies from within, a compromise of pressure and resistance, and give and take of matter and force, a ceaseless conversion of action into counter-action, of shock into stimulus. Not, again, in the more complex life of society, in which degenerations are for ever being neutralized by activity in the sound remainder, the insurgence of evil in one class by the spring of virtue in another, so that often with the last peal of the alarmist's tocsin the silent rectifications are setting in. Then why, on the field of religion, are we to be cowed by a threatening tendency, only because it is a tendency? We are, of course, not arguing here the case of faith, but only protesting against an unreasonable state of mind, against a surrender prior to argument, against a childish fallacy of observation under which men note advances but not retrocessions of an enemy, remember the siege laid but not the siege raised, the prophecy fulfilled, not the prophecy which miscarries. Why, because Sepharvaim has fallen, must Zion fall as well? Why should not God,

Who knows the abode and the going out and the coming in of every power which conquers on earth, put His bridle in the lips of this one and turn it back by the way by which it came?

But, in truth, the antidote needed is not intellectual, but moral. It is not better reasons for standing fast that we need, but better soldiership. The root of this Fatalism is impressibility—one of the worst faults in a soldier—impressibility, or, more simply, want of nerve. Those who thus yield are being treated as raw levies are by expert fighters, when they flutter them and seek to scare them cheaply off the field by the mere noise and flourish and pageantry of battle.\* And why are men so impressible? It is not hard for anyone to put his finger on the cause. It is the fruit of the rearing of this generation. We have been reared in an age which extravagantly shrinks from pain. A generation which in physical life thinks the extinction of pain and the attainment of ease to be not only a desirable aim, but a kind of moral ideal, so that a malefactor can hardly be punished or a child corrected without philanthropic protests—a generation which in intellectual life is courteous to every novelty in opinion and reticent of every decision, because the first is painful to repulse and the second is painful to make—which in public life so worships amenity and social comfort that it has no hardihood to give the negative direct, or to name public crime by its own name; which practises a charity that believeth all things which cannot be believed, and beareth all things which ought not to be borne,—such a generation has tampered with its nerve and unsinewed its soldiership. We need to put ourselves to a sterner school again, and relearn the old maxims of resistance and obduracy. Let us remember that we are soldiers of a veteran



army. Are we to be scared by the nearer beat of drum, and the driving in of outposts? That means battle, no doubt, but wherefore defeat? We are soldiers of a veteran army, and is its history a record of defeats? Surely not. If war is to be waged with omens and impressions, and if aggressiveness is to be an omen of victory, there has been nothing on earth so aggressive as Christianity, so uncompromising to demand all, so pertinacious to accept nothing less than all. If Rationalism parade its conquests, Christianity can display a longer train of prisoners and captured symbols. "Where," we might retort, "where is the Jewish persecutor, where the Roman, where the barbarian? Where are the heresies that would have strangled the truth, where the worldliness that would have corrupted it? Where are the changing scepticisms of the changing ages, and where, more helpless still, the worships they have offered in the Church's place? Let them ask, 'Where are the gods of Hamath, and of Arpad, of Sepharvaim, and Hena, and Ivah?' We answer, 'And where is the fury of the oppressor?'"

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## II.

### Christ our Assessor in Judgment.

*(Second Sunday in Advent.)*

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I CORINTHIANS IV. 5.

"Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come."

**J**UDGE nothing." How very gladly some of us at some times would obey this precept! With what cheerfulness would we postpone to a future occasion, yes, though that occasion were as remote as the second coming of Christ, the act of making a judgment. It is so hard and so perilous a matter to judge. It has been indeed remarked, that a really good faculty of judgment, so far from being a commonplace gift, and one to be expected in the ordinary capable man, is, on the contrary, one of the very rarest endowments, and constitutes a kind of genius. Certainly, to judge well is very hard.

Yet to judge well is not more hard than it is necessary. In all forms of life which leave any room at all for the man's independent action—unless we are to make an exception of the artistic life, in which, however, probably the same faculty does duty under another name—it is the chief necessity for success that the man should judge right. This faculty is to a man's other faculties, to his various powers of industry, courage, versatility, persistency, shrewdness,



eloquence, very like what the field-marshal, seated in the tent, with his map before him, is to the battalions of brave men who cover the country a league or two on each side of him. It hangs upon that quiet man in the tent whether those battalions shall sweep the field before them or crumble into a helpless wreck. So to the forces of a man's life is this commanding gift of judgment. Or has it never happened to us to ask with surprise how it is that some schoolfellow or college friend has been, for all his fine and varied gifts, so entire a failure—and to have it answered by some older man with a shake of the head, and a muttered "No judgment"? Yes, the answer explains it well enough.

Judgment being so hard a task, and yet so necessary, we turn to the New Testament to learn what the oracles of Christianity can tell us of it. We are at first disappointed. For it is disappointing if, when you go to a counsellor, and ask him how you are to conduct some difficult operation which you must conduct somehow, he replies, "Do not do it!" Yet this seems the reply of the New Testament. "Judge not, that ye be not judged"; "Who art thou that judgest another?" "I judge no man," and so forth. It is true that the judgment here denied us is judgment of our neighbour's character. But then this is a kind of judging for which we have most frequent occasion. We must judge our neighbour if we are to decide anything in many of the practical courses of life, if we are to know whom we should serve with, whom we should invite to serve us, who shall be our chief, or our colleague, or our partner; and by this denial a vast class of most important matter is withdrawn from our criticism. It is true also that a critical faculty is recognized here and there as part of the Christian's equipment. We are bidden to "judge of ourselves what is right,"

to "approve things that are excellent," and to "try the spirits." But where is the emphasis on the duty of judging rightly which answers to the emphasis of "Judge not, that ye be not judged"? Where is a man, in the suffering and shrinking which accompany the need for a great decision, to find in Scripture the encouragement and the direction which he craves?

We may find that encouragement in a quarter which does not seem at first sight to promise it, this passage in St. Paul: "Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come." It does not promise encouragement or guidance, for St. Paul seems to be only echoing the "Judge not" of his Lord. But let us consider his counsel in the light of the circumstances which called it out. Christian Corinth was given to party spirit, was ranging itself under this or that teacher, with the cry of "I stand for Paul," or "I for Apollos," or "Peter is the name for me." And Paul is replying that in Christ there are no parties, and no teacher's name may be a watchword. All Christ's teachers are for all the Church, all and each they are but ministers, with differing tasks and gifts, of one same holy will of Christ: and therefore Christ's people, instead of forming wrangling judgments on the superiority or inferiority of their teachers, "I believe in this man," "I believe in that other," were to wait and suspend judgment. They must wait for the right time, and that right time is Christ's coming again. The reason for this waiting is that until Christ came men did not possess the means of judging, *for they did not know the facts*. These facts Christ would make known; He would make apparent to men's eyes "the hidden things of darkness," things all-important, but as yet unknown, and He would "make manifest the counsels of the heart," that is, the hidden motives which had been the cause of the men's

actions, the purity or the selfishness of those motives, which must first be ascertained before it could be judged whether the actions were good or bad. "Will you judge your leaders?" he says; "then wait till the Second Advent, for no judgment can be ripe till then."

And where is there help in this counsel for any perplexed mortal of ourselves? "Form no judgment before the right time, till the Lord come." What, not till then? Not till the Second Advent? What kind of a date is that? It may have been a date to Paul, if expectation of a near Parousia had not died in him; but to us it is no date at all; he might have as well said in the proverb, "wait for the Greek kalends"; Advent-tide to us is Never-tide. And one asks if his phrase is seriously meant at all, and is not rather a literary mode for the forbidding of judgment altogether, like some ironic form of adjournment of debate in parliament or court-house, meant only to put a question to dateless silence.

It may well have been so. When Paul bade these overhasty critics wait till the Advent because true criticism was impossible till then, he may have had no hope that this right time ever would arrive in their lives; he may have been stating the true condition of a judgment, the presence of Christ the revealer and interpreter, only as a warning not to judge at all—for that the true conditions never could be realized. But if this is so, how strikingly, and by what an unconscious oracle, he has counselled us later men how we may rightly judge. For as one meditates the words, and searches for that seed of eternal meaning which so rarely fails to lie even in words of a passing and local significance that have been spoken in great times by the great, suddenly it breaks upon one, 'Why, here is the very rule of all good judging at all times.' "Judge nothing before the time, until

the Lord come." You and I, friends, never will judge aright on great matters if we do not observe this rule; if we seek to judge before the time, and do not wait till the Lord comes. For come He does, aye, and in good time He comes, to reveal and to interpret, to make our judgments true. Only wait, He will be there in good time for this.

Memories of not a few among you will hold somewhere one and another scene of your inward history which will anticipate my thought and make its expression needless for you. The moments in which we are called on for one of the great decisions do so grave themselves upon the heart. If there are, as there will be, those who, from the fewness of their years or from the limited character of their experiences, do not yet know what a strain is put upon the spirit by a call for such decisions, let them believe us that when the time comes to them they will welcome anything their faith can bring them to sharpen insight or to fortify resolve. We can picture to ourselves one of you when, awhile hence, you have to front some one of those heart and head-searching problems which in life's tangled affairs now and then offer themselves. You *must* judge aright, for your whole earthly course may relish of the decision taken; and yet to judge aright, how desperately hard! Truth at the bottom of a well—it is a poor, weak, inadequate figure for the hopelessness of getting at the truth in any practical question which matters very much to a human life. Every fact in your problem is of a double colour—now this, and presently that; every consideration changes its weight as you build on it or reject it; every principle of conduct, every maxim of the world which you bring to bear upon your decision has an ambiguous voice, counselling either one course or else the opposite; and over one-third of the field hangs a fog which will not lift, and con-

ceals you know not what of the hidden things of darkness and the counsels of other men's hearts. "How shall I judge aright?" you cry; and the brain grows weary with thinking, and the heart sick with fear of a false conclusion and the hopelessness of grasping certainty. Ah! but even then, and when the heart is ready to faint, there comes burningly upon you the thought, "Judge not . . . until the Lord come." For He *is* coming. He would never leave me to judge this hard thing alone. Let me but wait till the unseen counsellor is at my ear; let me pray for that quiet of the soul in which the servant can hear the Master speak; let me clear my mind of self-seeking, of conceit, of desire to triumph, of the false pride of self-consistency, of proving I was right all along; clear it of fear, of indolence, of softness, of respect for the tongues of men—let me do this, and I shall truly decide. For the Lord is coming my way to decide it with me; the hour of my personal need is the hour of His Advent for my soul; He is near, He will be in a moment at my side: then in the breath of His Presence there will be vision; the hidden facts will shine out of the darkness, the counsels of hearts will glimpse to my eyes, the mind of Christ will be the mind of me, and the judgment of this mortal will be the judgment through him of his God.

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### III.

## Is Advent Future?

(Third Sunday in Advent.)

ACTS I. 7.

"It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power."



DVENT is a word which raises to the mind a double distance, the characteristic perspective of prophecy. It says to us, "Make ready for Christmas," and it says, "Make ready for the Last Day." As the name of an ecclesiastical season the former was the first intention, and this purely practical aspect of the season is not liable to any change in its value by changes in men's mental habits. The Nativity is a fact in the past, and as such unalterable; while there is reason for observing the Feast of the Nativity, there will be reason for making ready for it. With the second intention of the name it is otherwise. Here we have not history, but prophecy. Shall we say that the name of Advent, when we mean the Advent of prophecy, has not changed its value for us with the changes in the mind of men? Is that value one and the same to the men who used to make prayer *pro mora finis*, that mercifully the Lord would delay His coming, and to our modern selves, who not only have experienced the delays of nineteen centuries, but have learnt

from science to know how wide are the flaming walls of the universe, and how long the hours are of the days of Creation? Frankly, is the thought of the Second Advent a power upon minds so trained? We believe that Christ will come. O yes; but the æons between our day and His! The trumpet shall sound, as Paul saith. Yes; but our ears cannot tingle with the imagined note of it; the distance dumbs the reverberation. When we think of the men who thought no energy of haste in good works was enough, because the time was short, or even of those later ones who prayed for the Lord's delay, or even of those folk of just nine hundred years ago, to whom secular business became of no import in view of the judgment-trumpet of the thousandth year, we shall admit that Advent, as an event in future time, has lost momentum on our spirits. Yet this is not a force which we can afford to lose.

But, then, is Advent only an event in the future? Certainly it is always so described to us, certainly the tense in which Scripture predicates it is the future tense. Yet I call to mind that warning of Christ when He was asked to give a date of His Kingdom, "It is not for you to know times or seasons"; and I am led to read it not only as a rebuke to the curiosity of an inexperienced Church, but also as a corrective to the failure of curiosity in a Church grown too much experienced. Are we not making a mistake when we view the Advent under the form of time; are we not missing the point not only if we ask for a date that cannot be given, but if we even think that the date matters? That we must think of the Advent as taking place in time, if it takes place at all, is no doubt inevitable, since time is one of the conditions of the act of thought. But the chronology of the event may be non-essential. Let us see what results if we



endeavour to forget the element of time, if we take not a quantitative but a qualitative view of the mysterious fact, and ask not when Advent shall be, but what Advent is.

For when we ask that question, the answer must be that, putting out of sight that more familiar picturing of the Coming, the white throne, the escorting clouds, the trumpet blast, the bar of judgment—things which admittedly do not give us information as to fact, but are figures to help our mind receive fact otherwise communicated—Advent can be nothing else than the full realization of something already here and well-known to us. The Second Coming is not a new event; it is the completion of an old event, the First Coming. The consummation of all things in Christ is the Incarnation perfected, the Word become All Flesh. What are the details in our conception of the Advent? The reign of Christ and His Saints? What is that reign but the final establishment of a reign begun in the Bethlehem stable, the King's writ running everywhere? The Resurrection of the Just? But the life is already in their veins, for they are risen with Christ; it has but to be made dominant over the last enemy, body's death. The bliss of the redeemed in Heaven? But that is the righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost become wholly unmingled and unmarred. Judgment of quick and dead? What is it but that earth's confusions are brought at last to true order; things and persons seem at last as they really are, the vile person no longer called liberal, nor the churl said to be bountiful; goodness found in the final upshot to be one with strength, and evil that seemed strong declared to be weakness and nothingness? In a word, Advent is not so truly Christ come *again*, as Christ come *aholy*. Advent is the season of Fulfilment, of the Incarnation made perfect, of the things seen now in

part and prophesied in part, interpreted then by the vision of the whole, broken and vanishing gleams gathered at length into the rounded orb of the Light of Light; faint, precarious, ambiguous beginnings of good realized then in Christ become all in all. Now this view of Advent, as the fulfilment of the Incarnation, the God made flesh become the flesh made divine, how it renews its lost impulse upon the mind! For the Advent faith is no longer belief in an event which is future, it is belief in a condition of things present now and here. That condition is a capacity of perfection. Human nature is full of evil or imperfection, but it is on its way to perfection. In spite of all the visible drift towards decay and evil, the grand controlling law of nature is one that makes for life and health; the seed of Perfectness is there. Christ is not only coming towards His world, He is *in* it; the voice with which He stirs us to rise and work is not the far off trumpet, thinned and dumbled by the æons of distance, but a whisper, still and small, breathing up to us from the sod we are set to till, from the clay we are bidden fashion, to make us sure that a blessing is in it, and our labour not in vain in the Lord.

Let us see, then, how this thought of Advent, that it is not more a future event than an inherent quality in things, must work upon our Christian life; how upon our practice, and how on our ideals.

On our practice. The moral activity of the Christian is liable to be depressed by a hopelessness from a twofold source. There is, first, the worldly hopelessness, the despair which is bred from contact with the world and experience of what the world is. It is the special form in which the sorrow of the world, that worketh death, is felt by the energetic. When life has gone far enough for that vague-

ness about our capabilities which we mistook for vastness to be replaced by a hard, definite certainty of our limits, and our powers seem at a standstill; when the difficulty of improving mankind ever so little has been brought home to us, and the horrible unspiritual law of averages confronts us with its iron fence, while the discovery of unimprovableness in others is being verified by the discovery of how little we ourselves improve; then this sorrow of the world may try us hard with sourness and cynicism in the heart, leadenness and dull perfunctoriness in act. Will the thought of the Advent of the trumpet and the judgment bar touch this deadness of the spirit? It may. But more vivifying is the touch of the Advent of the Incarnation, the Advent of the Word made All Flesh. For then it becomes possible to discern a glory in this sordid, dusty workshop of earth; then the struggling, maimed, world-stained Church of our knowledge can seem the Heavenly City of our faith; then it becomes possible to believe in the spiritual fulfilment of that mortal who is ourself or our neighbour, to discern the saint in the clownish nature or the sin-beset, the just man made perfect in the child; then a tender beauty and dignity comes over these works of God's hands, and they are precious in our sight again, and all effort seems worth the while.

And next there is the other-worldly hopelessness. I mean the shadow of deadness thrown on work by the prospect of the other world, with its Great Day coming, which will reverse and cancel all the present. What use to weary ourselves with the reluctant material of the actual, the immediate, the earthly, when there is a Great Day to drown all our successes and obliterate all our failures? We feel like the spendthrift, who will not work or save because of the

golden fortune impending which makes thrift or thriftlessness all one. And so we are tempted to make much of the Church, the altar-step, the prayer-chamber, the confession (if that be our mind), or the religious experience (if our mind be so), and whatever else has some relation to the Seventh Heaven, but to think coldly of life's homely and diurnal facts—the care and education of our children, the consideration of our fellow-workers, the conduct of money matters, the house-to-house visitation of the pastor, which should complete the ministrations of the priest, and the daily moralities of shop, and field, and yard, and athletic meeting, and trust committee, and municipal council board. Yet these things are the clay which the Advent-power is fashioning towards a realization of the Word made flesh. In these matters every moment an Incarnation is fulfilling itself or is failing, and the trumpet of the Advent will hardly sound unless men will hear that lesser bugle-call of duty which bids them prepare for the daily inglorious war. How should Christ come in glory unless He come first in work?

Last, and very briefly, the effect on our ideal life. Since first a Plato was criticized by an Aristotle, the idealist has always to meet the criticism that his ideal is not really anything, it is but a verbal double of the real, a phantom of the actual projected on a mist. The idealist who is Christian has his answer. The truth concerning Advent is the truth concerning Ideals, Advent holds the keys of them all. As the Second Coming is less a future event than a quality inherent in facts, so with any true ideal. It is a part of the grand ideal of Christianity which we name the Coming of Christ with power, it is a detail of the Incarnation, it is a particle of that Divine Perfectness already begun among us. So it is not a thing hoped for, but a thing known to his

experience, a force of which he feels the living throb in his own and in his friend's life, it is that which he has heard, which he has seen with his eyes, which he has gazed upon, and his hands have handled, of the Word of Life which became flesh, and evermore becomes it, until Christ have become all in all.

Do we modern men desire to revive on our spirits the momentum of Advent ? It is thus we shall do it, by remembering that the Advent is not only future but present, is the fulfilling of the Incarnation. In that faith we shall hold fast each one his own life's ideal, seeing it to be part of a great whole which vouches its reality. We shall work with a heartier energy each on his plot in God's vineyard, sure that a blessing is in it, and the toil will be paid. We shall be at once more gentle and more exacting with ourselves and with others, for we shall hope all things and believe all things of them and us, seeing that the Word is made flesh in each. And we shall leave in the great Father's power, where He has put them, the times and the seasons, for what matter the "when" and the "how long ?" "Behold," saith He, "I am with you always." "Behold, the Kingdom of God is within you."

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#### IV.


### The Test of the Spirits.

*(Fourth Sunday in Advent.)*

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#### I ST. JOHN IV. 1, 2.

"Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they be of God . . . Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God."

"ELIEVE not every spirit." Of what is St. John thinking?

Perhaps if we had crossed the Ephesian market-place and caught sight of some sinister men in an unfamiliar foreign garb calling round him a crowd to witness a feat of Egyptian or Chaldæan magic; or seen a troop of worshippers filing in at the doors of a temple, in whose darkness some Asian mystery was to be dramatized, we should have caught John's drift at once. "Do not go after these people, because they pretend to trade with spirits. There are many false spirits; only one true Spirit, the Spirit of God."

You will say, then John's teaching is out of date. What do wizards, astrologers, and mystics matter to us?

Well, I am not sure but that a preacher who knew enough of the subject would find much to say that matters to us about the like things. For one does hear of "spirits" who are nowadays pursued and questioned by the curious



with an avidity not shown in questioning the Spirit which is certainly divine; and one has heard of religious mysteries brought from Asia, and treated in Western capitals as of great value by persons for whom Christianity seems not mysterious enough. But I do not speak of these things. They would be very pertinent illustrations of John's warning; but I think it more useful to try to generalize that warning.

The gist of his warning was—"Do not be misled by spirits, because they are spirits. To be spiritual is not, therefore, to be good."

Those of us who look back on the outset of life, the days when we began to think, may recall that we were then very prone to make this mistake, to believe spirits because they were spiritual. That the flesh could be a prompter of evil we knew, how could we not? But the spiritual temptations of which our pastors spoke, what were they? Ambition, that alert, strenuous, stern, athletic spirit, the foe of sensual indulgence, that makes us scorn delights and live laborious days, could this be anything but good? The love of knowledge, that clarified, chaste, ascetic spirit, could it bring a stain? The craving for experience, that brave and vital spirit, with its promise of the soul's enlargement, need we fear to be wooed by it? The spirit of beauty, that dainty and winsome spirit, is it not of God Who made all things beautiful in their time? And these new religions, with their delicate creeds, so full of Christian enthusiasm, though not of Christ; these new philanthropies, which lack of Christian self-sacrifice nothing at all but a reason for sacrificing self; is it likely that impulses so plainly spiritual can lead us anywhere but to good?

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits,



whether they be of God," said St. John. I think he is saying it still.

When he said "try them," he also taught men how. "Hereby know ye the Spirit of God; every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God."

Again we ought to think first of what was actually before John's mind when he wrote. We know it. It was a set of people, intellectual, perhaps rather superfine people, for whom the Christianity of Apostles seemed hardly good enough. It was unworthy of the Son of God, said they, to be born as a man, much more to die as a man; for was not human flesh a poor and vile thing, and incurably associated with badness; and human flesh scourged, tortured, spitted on, nailed to a beam, done to death! Horrible; impossible! Oh, no, no. It was all quite different from this. The Spirit of God came down indeed upon Jesus at His Baptism, there and then only it entered Him; and when the hour of mortal ruin overtook the earthly frame of Jesus, then the Spirit of God fled away betimes from the doomed body, and left it to be nailed to the cross and perish, while the spirit remained, as spirits should, untouched by suffering.

Such talkers were the false prophets, men inspired by spirits not of God, whom the Christian must put to the test. Do these spirits confess that Christ is come in the flesh; do they admit that God truly became man—are they believers in the Incarnation? If not, fly them, for they are spirits of error, perhaps of evil.

Well, that was St. John's touchstone, and perhaps it served his purpose. But how can it ours? Belief in the Incarnation! Will this old-world, unpractical engine of dogmatic theology, out of date and out of gear, help us in our living, modern problems? Will it thresh and sift for me

the true grain from the rubbish, and tell me whether the spiritual impulse which pleads with my spirit is holy and trustworthy or evil and to be abhorred? What in the world have ambition, intellectual freedom, love of experience, and the new fashions in religion and morals, to do with the doctrine of the Incarnation?

What is there that has *not* to do with the Incarnation?

We all very well remember how it was said, long before Christ came in the flesh, that God made man in His own image. Yes, God made him so. And presently man *unmade* him, spoilt and disfigured in him that image of God. Remember this as you read that other saying, "The Word was made flesh," and you will have other thoughts about this dogma of the Incarnation. God was made flesh. Why, that is to say that into this human clay of which all we are moulded, this human clay which first had worn and then had lost the likeness of the Divine Maker, into this that likeness came back again. Again the image of God was seen in a Man. Ah! but not a man only; it had entered not a man, but men. Christ is henceforth in us all and each; and when we speak of the world as growing Christian we mean, or we ought to mean, that human nature is growing again like and more like, through the working of Christ's life in it, to God, Who made it like Himself at the first. The Incarnation—an abstract dogmatic formula—and yet it asserts no less than a second creation of the world and of man, the remaking of what had been unmade, so that God might look on it again once more, and say, "Behold, it is very good." The Incarnation—a word as dry and remote and unmeaning to many of us as some technicality of an unknown science—and yet the sense of it is that each separate living soul of us within these walls at this hour has

within him (if he knows it, or if he knows it not) a force working, which, unless it be too sorely, too obdurately hindered, will make his nature daily more pure and loving and noble, and like to the Father in Heaven, so that the simple story of his mortal days shall be a chapter in the mighty tale of how God made again the earth.

If the Incarnation means this, then at any rate it is a truth which matters. Think ! The truth that the one prevailing vital force, the one decisive agent in the movement of earthly affairs, is God dwelling in the world, and in each man of that world. How can a man arrange his life successfully if he take no account of such a fact as this ? He might as well build a tower in defiance of the principles of gravitation, or construct a ship in contempt of the laws of buoyancy. Of those which concern human destiny, this must be the truth of truths, that God is in man, striving to shape him to His likeness, that is, that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.

So when the spirits whisper in a young man's ear, and he doubts whether they are of God or no, he may wisely ask, "Does this spirit confess Christ come in the flesh ? Can its counsel be reconciled with the fact that God is in human kind, making us like Himself ?"

Say it is the spirit of intellectual freedom. It whispers a man close, its breath is on his cheek, his mind dilates with its promise of the joys of enquiry, discovery, judgment, the dignity of "those that know." Yes ; but does it confess the Incarnation ? Does it consent that when I try to understand my world, I shall do it with a readiness to find and welcome a God *in* the world, to believe that the things which happen there are the expression of His will ; that the true, final order of human fact is the moral order, and the

right interpreter of that order is the pure heart? Or, on the contrary, is it bidding me take my pastime in the field of thought for the sake of the zest of discussion, the stimulus of being emancipated, the vanity of being wiser than the herd, but with an airy unconcern as to the issue, whether as the fruit of my study there will emerge a God the Creator or no? If the last, then wherever the spirit came from, at least it is not of God.

Or say it is ambition. There is right ambition and wrong. How shall I know it? Ask if it confesses the Incarnation. For there is one spirit of ambition which sees in the world no God come in the flesh and working out in human affairs a divine purpose, but sees only an unhallowed battle-field where each fights for his own hand, and victory is to the strong and the cunning and the lucky, and God and right do not count. That spirit can only teach you to be selfish and hard, and outdo your rivals and prosper by their loss; none would say this is "of God." But there is another spirit which says, "God is in His world making it good, and He cannot spare *your* help: He is in human nature, and you are a man, so He has a man's work for you. Therefore be that man; be yourself, your fullest, strongest, most valiant self; nay, be (if you can) great, for Him and by Him, make full proof of your human ministry, magnify your office of man, decline no holy enterprise, let God work freely in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure, for there is no greatness like to this." Well, this too is ambition; it counsels you to make much of self, but it is a self which confesses a Christ come within it. This spirit is of God.

Ah! true; we are not all ambitious, as we are not all clever. We do not covet honour nor knowledge. Yet one thing all covet; we all want to be happy; a spirit of well-

being whispers us everyone. But what kind of spirit? Does it confess Christ come in the flesh? I mean, does it say, "Try to get rid of all the troublesome things, care, work, burdens, responsibilities; get all the pleasant things you can; have a good time of it." A good time! Oh, friends, but that is not enough. A man's well-being is not measured by time, for he is of eternity. A good time! Excellent counsel from a spirit which sees in man only a higher animal, perishing in due course like the beasts that perish. Eat and drink, for to-morrow we die; have a good time while time is yours at all. Good counsel, good sense, from such a counsellor, one that sees in the world not a living God but a nature that is ever born and ever dies. But do not listen to it. Listen that other voice, which says, "God is within you, yea, in *your* flesh, yours, is He come"; let Him handle it as He will and all is well; the hard lot and the easy, the wealth and the want, the pain or the prosperity, the loneliness or the love, these are but the one means or the other by which the Holy Power is forming in you again the likeness of itself. Let these days of mortal life be a good time or a bad, it is all one; mortal life is the God within, the Christ come in my flesh; that which I live is Christ; and presently—when I wake up after His likeness, I shall be satisfied with it.

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V.

*New Beginnings.*

*(Christmas.)*


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ISAIAH IX. 6.

"Unto us a Child is born."

ST. JOHN III. 4.

"How can a man be born when he is old?"

"NTO us a Child is born." To a great number of us, perhaps the greater number, the words have in them a special beauty of association which is of our own day; we can no longer hear them without recalling the lofty strain of song to which a great master has wedded the words. Yet we do not need the echoes of that musician's chords to persuade us of a stately and buoyant music which lives in the bare words and syllables of the prophet's speech, "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder; and His Name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." Where does the power come from by which the march of these majestic words so affects us? Not from the chance association with a noble music, not only from the magic which there is in the rhythm of the poet, not even only from the Christian's interpretation of the words as a portraiture, drawn in human terms, of his God

made flesh, but also (as I venture to guess) from yet another source—a human emotion, wide as our race, and earlier than the Christian's faith. If it were possible for us here to strip from Isaiah's periods that sublime significance which makes them a watchword of our dearest hopes ; if, I mean, we could hear them read, and yet know in them nothing of a Christ Who is *our* Counsellor, Who is for *us* a Prince of Peace—why, even so, I believe our hearts would thrill to the beat of those words, because they are human hearts, and have the sadnesses and the longings of humanity. "Unto us a Child is born" is a note to which a chord responds in the spirit, which is the spirit of a man.

I am thinking of such a thing, for example's sake, as this. Some proud and ancient nation is waiting in silent anxiety for tidings from a princely house, tidings which will make sure the succession to a throne which as yet lacks an heir. Suddenly from the royal doors the news, the happy news, is flashed abroad—Unto the childless Prince a child is born ; unto the nation's fortune a son is given. Ah ! what news is here ! The cannon must speak it to the skies, the joy bells must peal it from hill to hill through a kingdom's breadth, there must be feasting at a thousand public tables, worshipping in ten thousand Churches, and at nightfall leagues of city will be one blaze of light. So glad can men be when unto them a child is born.

But, again, I am thinking of something very different indeed. Under the narrow roof of a man of the multitude, under the thatch of a cottager, there befalls the ancient mystery of a new life born into the world. It is no prince, no heir to a throne, no heir even of many acres or much gold. No ; only one more undistinguished mortal, to-day another helpless mouth, to-morrow another winner of bread,



another struggler for day's wage. Yet under the narrow roof joy springs up like a fountain, and it goes rippling abroad in smiles and greetings and joy-givings and helpful services, as neighbour tells the news to neighbour in the street; while within there the new mother clasps to her breast her more than prince, her more than heir, and drinks in and in the wonder and the bliss and glory of a light sprung out of darkness, a life come out of nothingness, and murmurs to her own heart, "Unto *me* a child is born."

These are contrasted incidents. What have they in common with each other, and what have both in common with the thought of Isaiah? They are all bound together by this element in all, the element of hope, and that the hope of a new beginning.

The nation, pondering on the birth of a prince, says, "Times have been ill with us, famines have exhausted our stores, trade has ebbed from our coasts, we have been made miserable by misgovernment, by faction, by evil counsellors, and our own folly; we have been impoverished and humbled in wars. Ah! yes. But new king, new days. With the child born to-day dawns the happy age—peace, honour, plenty, order, self-respect. Thank God, we can begin again."

And the parent, pondering on the child says, "Well, my own life has been neither happy nor good; I have been weak here, and foolish there; I have strayed, and blundered, and come short; things have been against me; I was ill-taught, ill-counselled; early mistakes have hampered and hindered me all through. But this pure babe, with his unspoiled heart and uncorrupted blood, he will start fair, and make amends for my poor life. A new soul, a new chance. Thank God, the world begins again for him."

A new beginning in the national life, a new beginning in the family life—thus men believe in these, and thus they welcome them. Would they welcome less a new beginning in the personal life? It may indeed be that even the unfortunate would scarcely choose, if choice were possible, to live life over again even with more prosperous chances. There is a world-weariness which has made men in all ages and of all religions say, that if the divine power were to offer them to return to the estate of wailing infancy in its cradle, they would resolutely decline. Yes; but if a divine power should instead offer the man that to-morrow he should start fair, all old errors annulled, old shames blotted out, old follies forgotten as if they were not, with strength and nerve unsapped by indulgence, with vision undimmed by vulgar custom, that to-morrow his life should leap clear of the entangling, crippling, benumbing clutch of the past, that to-morrow he should be at length free to become that better man which he had ever longed, ever failed to be—would he refuse this? No; we would welcome such new beginning as this, if it could be ours. Oh, if not only unto us, but in us, could be born a child! But do we expect it?

The question brings me to my other text. An old man, old in years, experience, honours, is sitting in a room of some street of Jerusalem at night, face to face with Another, young in years, yet who spake as never man yet spake. And from the younger man have fallen words which told of a being born again. Sadly and heavily the elder makes response, "How can a man be born when he is old? How can I, Nicodemus, teacher of Israel, the honourable councillor, with all a life's experience in my breast, all its labours on my back, with habits of how to think, feel, act, formed for good a score of years ago, how can I come clear of my past

and begin all things again? It cannot be. As the years have made me, they must end me. A man cannot be born when he is old."

There is no answer to his despondency except the answer which lay hid in the nature of that young Prophet out of Nazareth. Old, wise, experienced, weary Nicodemus, you were right. Man cannot be born when he is old. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That part of our human being, mind and affection alike with body, which is of earth and time, which did but grow up out of the bosom of earth, as the dumb creature grows, or the herb, is subject to the law of earth; it can but spend once the force stored up in it, can but blossom and fruit, and sink again into earth's bosom. There is no new beginning for flesh which is born of flesh. But that which is born of the Spirit, how is it with this? That which is born of the Spirit, is spirit; to the law of spirit it is subject. There was a romantic speculation of our modern science (a speculation which yet is more than two thousand years old) that physical life upon our globe had its origin from chance seeds fallen on it from the wreckage of older planets. That is a fancy, and perhaps an idle one, in the sphere of physical truth; but it is, in the spiritual order, the expression of our very belief. There has fallen upon earth a seed not of earth, a seed of a life heavenly, which grows now in the soil of earth, but is not of it, and springs and blossoms into a wondrous flower, of whose form and tint earth cannot give account. That is the story of the spiritual in man. That is the belief declared in this festival of the Word made Flesh, the Christ born a Man. If that belief is true, then there is in human nature the power of a new beginning, then a man can spring clear of his past, for there is in him something which is not of his

past, does not belong to this mortal order, does not grow old and weary like all the rest, but renews its strength, and lives because God lives. Mere words, a doctrinal fancy, the rhetoric of religion? Well, we cannot prove them to another. But there are times when they prove themselves to our own hearts. In some hour of deeper prayer, of perilous crisis, of more piercing penitence, of disappointment or bereavement, or again, in seasons when peace and well-being and joy flow in upon the soul like a stream, in such hours of self-knowledge there does stir and quicken in us a seed of immortality; and we are sure that not all the entanglements of the weak, foolish past, not all the perversities of the will, not the numbing magic of habit, can stifle the seed. We *can* begin again. Not a new earthly course. Nay, and who wishes it? We have tried earth, we want something better. But we can begin again the soul's life, the life of the love of God, the life which matters because it does not perish. This we can begin, because Christmas is a true story, and because unto us, in us, a Child, a holy Child, is born.

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## VI.

### Death the Harvester.

*(New Year's Day.)*

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ST. JOHN XII. 24.

"Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone : but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."



ON the speaker of these words had just fallen a great joy. Certain Greeks, present at Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover, had asked for an audience with Jesus of Nazareth. As His life had opened with a homage of the Gentile world, when the Wise Men kneeled at His cradle, so was it to end with a homage of the Gentiles. It was a slight incident, this desire of a few proselytes to meet the great Jewish Prophet, but it was the pledge of events which were immense. In it Jesus saw opening the great door and effectual in the dividing wall of Jew and Greek, by which the whole wide world (no longer one little tribe of human-kind in a corner of earth) should enter in to the truth and sit at the feet of the Lord of Glory. It was but the narrowest, the most momentary opening of that door : but as through the merest loophole or chink a man's eye can sweep over leagues of landscape to the horizon's edge, so in that moment's glimpse the Christ sees the great world made His own. "The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified."

And instantly over the springing joy passes the cold shadow of a cloud. Glorified; yes, and how? By a death, the death which a very few days, a few hours would bring Him. The victory over men's hearts was certain, and here was the assurance and foretaste of it. Yes; but to win that victory, the Victor first must die. The seed should bring forth much fruit; there was no doubt of that harvest; but, like the seeds of nature's planting, it must part with the life that was, before it could have the vaster life which was to be.

Some days ago, as people were turning away from the grave of a ruler in our Church,\* I heard one man and another give words to the thought that the dead man's purpose—the purpose of reuniting divided Christians—would bear more fruit now that he was gone. That the remark should be made was inevitable; for this has become with us a kind of settled belief, that the good which men intend is more realized after they are dead than while they live. Someone said in a play, "The evil that men do lives after them," but the speaker missed the mark. Evil *does* outlive the evildoer, true; but it does not happen with evil as it does with good, that death gives an *added* life, makes the man's deeds and words *more* powerful than while he breathed. We have grown to believe that with good deeds and noble words this is the case, that it is the doer's death which makes the harvest spring. This is a fact of observation. Can we see also the reasons why the fact should be so?

First, we must not overlook one very prosaic reason. It is that time is required for everything, even good things. It takes time for a new idea, especially if it is a noble one, to work its way down into the intelligence and into the

\* Charles Wordsworth, Bishop of St. Andrew's.



conscience of ordinary men. The process is a long one ; and the life of any one man is short. Thought is long, life is brief. A single man cannot live enough years to be the spectator of his own teaching's success. That is one simple, prosaic reason why the harvest of good whitens over the graves of the sower, not at their feet and under their living eyes ; there is not time for it to do so while they live.

But then we are persuaded of a far deeper, indeed a mysterious reason. It is a belief rooted in the very heart of our beliefs as Christians that all higher good is brought to pass by sacrifice. But sacrifice is death, the parting with a lower life for the sake of a higher life, the losing life to save it. By an ordinance of the Creator of the world, so wide and so deeply laid that it seems to underlie all things that are, except only that creative will of His, it is decreed that there must be a dying in order that there may be a living. Those who have discerned that law would expect that the noblest purposes of a mortal should be prospered by the mortal's death, though they may fail to see by what processes that effect is worked.

It is unlikely that the processes of so mysterious a fact should be visible. But one process is visible, and it is instructive. I cannot doubt that one of the commonest reasons why a man's great idea bears more fruit after his death is simply that the man is not there himself. Why do people disregard a speaker's truth, why do they resist it, mock it, belittle it, and counterplot it ? Well, for various causes, but oftenest this—that it is the speaker's truth, that the man answerable for it is there. The pure truth is mixed with his personality ; it is flavoured by his whims, self-consciousnesses, ungracefulnesses, foibles, self-assertiveness ; it is infected by his pugnacity or his adroitness in strategy ; it is

clogged by attachment to it of other crochets or less worthy aims of his. Thus there comes about confusion ; the question is not argued purely ; opposition to the speaker becomes opposition to his idea ; men do not want to baffle the truth, they do want to baffle its champion. Great is truth, and would prevail—if it were not for her allies. But let the champion die ; let that confusing human personality fall away from the cause it pleaded, and leave it bare, or leave beside it only the pathetic shadow of some lost champion, no longer the mark of rivalry, who died for it under arms—then men have eyes for the truth, the seed falls on a thornless soil, and the harvest springs up.

These are abstract thoughts, however interesting. I add one inference which is practical. Why wait for death ? If truth prospers more in men's hearts when death purges it of the promoter's selfishness, why not purge the truth sooner ? If you want to do good to your neighbours (for we are not concerned only with great men, philosophers, reformers, saints) ; if you want to do good to your neighbours, let them see that you are not seeking your own good at the same time, let them believe you do not desire the triumph of your truth because it is *your* triumph, let them see you are content that good should be done without profit, or credit, or victory to yourself ; show them that for the sake of the high end you can put away vanity, combativeness, irritability, love of power, wilfulness—and you will already have died the death which gives the increase to truth, the seed will fall into the ground, and the harvest may not wait for your grave.

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## VII.

### Prophecy in the Book of Revelation.

*(Septuagesima.)*

#### REVELATION XXI. 2.

"And I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of Heaven."



TO-DAY, Septuagesima, the order of the Church makes us read as Lessons a chapter from Genesis and a chapter from the Revelation. No doubt the reason for the one Lesson is the reason for the other. If it is right that to-day we should read how the world was made, it is right we should go on to read how the world is being and will be re-made. For that is the meaning of the new Heaven and new earth, and the new Jerusalem coming down from Heaven.

But I am going to ask the question why we should, either to-day or any day, read this book of the Revelation.

You will say it is in the Bible, and that is enough. Well, but it very nearly failed to be in the Bible. It was one of the books about which the Churchmen who settled the Canon of the New Testament, that is, who settled what books of the Early Christians were to be considered sacred books and what were not, had many doubts. They did not like the matters contained in the book, the doctrines taught, and the conclusions which people drew from them. So this

reason for reading it is less imperative than in the case of many other books.

But then this, I am sure, is not the reason why people, on their own account, read the Revelation. They do it because they find the book a specially interesting one. Anyone who gathers a class to read the New Testament with him, will, if he gives his class a choice, probably be asked to take the Revelation. At least, it used to be so, I know. But the interest commonly taken in the book, if natural, is not always wise. Some of its readers, I believe, turn its pages only for the sake of the rich, vivid pictures of apocalyptic scenes, even as they would pore over a picture book of the same subjects. There is, I fear, just a suspicion of the sensational in their preference. Then some people appear to treat the book as a repertoire of predictions about political and ecclesiastical events, some of which they hope to interpret and obtain guidance from. While here and there some bitter, fanatical person prizes the work as a mine, out of which he can quarry terms and images of abuse for the men or institutions which he dislikes. None of these are good reasons for studying the Revelation. Let me name to you here a better one. I will take it from St. John's own words. "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things that are written therein: for the time is at hand." "The words of this prophecy." That is where it lies, the reason for studying the book. It is prophecy; the writer is a prophet. Read it as prophecy, the word to you of a prophet, and you read it rightly.

Yes; but what is it to be a prophet, and write prophecy? I will own that if you answered that question only by a consideration of the Revelation, you might easily fall into

the old mistake of thinking that a prophet is a man who foretells things before they happen. For the Revelation is one long chain of pictured events which, it is said, are going to come to pass—wars and plagues and burnings and earthquakes, wonders seen in Heaven, monstrous appearances, rebellions, overthrows, the battle of Armageddon, the binding of Satan, the millennium begun, and last (as to-day) God's holy city established on the earth. Who is a foreteller, you say, if not he who wrote of the Seven Trumpets and the Seven Vials of the wrath of God?

Well, but if this is the truest value of the book, that it foretells things, one would have to regretfully note that the predictions have not come to pass yet, and that the prediction on which they all really hang, that Christ would come quickly, has certainly proved mistaken. Christ has not come quickly. His coming seems as far off as ever. No; if you are going to read St. John because of the future things which he warns you of, the encouragement to study is not a great one.

How, then, is he a prophet, and what is the use of this book?

Let me try and tell you, not in a formal or scientific manner, but by a little homely picture which has risen to my mind. I am thinking of one of those good, God-fearing, Bible-reading folk once so common on these Scottish hills, and not all gone now, some old mountain shepherd. His hard, long day in the rain and wind is done; the sheep safely lodged, and himself at home again. He has stirred his fire, and lit his candle, and drawn the curtains against the wind, and taken down the big Bible, and opened on this last page of it. "He showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of Heaven from God, having the



glory of God, and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. And the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass . . . and the Lamb is the light thereof." Old shepherd, what know you of all these things—of gates of pearl, and lucent gems, sapphire or chrysolyte, streets of gold, and walls of jasper? What is it all to you, who perhaps never saw even one of our cities of earth, with their grimy brick and their streets of mire, and their canopy of smoke instead of glory? Ah! well, but as he reads, it seems to the reader as if all about him changed; the hard, coarse, weather-beaten life, the rough fare, the rough clothing, the rougher tasks, the wind howling on his thatch, and storm lashing his pane, ail fall away from him, and he is transplanted into a new world, he is "caught up" toward a Heaven, he is suddenly "in the Spirit," aye, even as St. John, who wrote it all; he is in the Spirit, and there he treads a new earth with a new Heaven over him, he walks a city full of mystic light, in a blissful company clothed with glory.

What is it that has befallen him? A dream, a fancy, which will pass away when he wakes at the stirring of his dog, or the candle wick burning dim, and the common, sordid place returns, bleak and near, upon his mind? Ah! not so. It is now that he is awake; it is now that he is seeing things as they really are; it is now that he has, by the help of John, the prophet of God, escaped from the illusion, the unreal life which seems to be, but is not. For he is away with John, away from these shows of things which we call mortal life, away in that ideal world which is the true world, the world that shall last, the world where he will spend all of his being except this fragment of it, his three score and ten upon the earth. Now it is, now, in this vision



of the new Heaven and new earth and the city of the saints, that he truly lives, realizes the fulness of his manhood, puts on the true glory of man. The flesh, the temporal, the accidents of mortal existence melt away from him, leave him unladen, and he is carried away on wings of the Spirit to be nearer God, and know what God is, and what the soul, and learn the things which for him must shortly come to pass.

It is no fancy of mine that the prophet John does such things as these for the simple Christians who read his words. It is fact. And what I am trying to say to you (for here I have done) is that a prophet's use to us, and therefore the use of the book of the Revelation, is to help us to know not the events which are some far day going to happen, but to know, to remember, to feel, to take into our heart and mind the real, abiding, eternal, infinitely-concerning truths about ourselves as immortal souls; truths which God reveals to us, but life and the flesh conceals from us: as this truth which John has pictured for us in his prophecy's splendid close—that there is a city of the saints, where this poor soul of ours must enter, or else lie cast out in the dark and the sorrow and the torment of regret, a city of beauty, peace, love, glory, which he who overcometh shall inherit; or, if you will have it in duller words, stripped of imagery, that there is a life of us men which, whatever the fashion of it, is pure and beautiful and happy, which shall be ours indeed if we will seek it, and that this is our true life, the one that matters, this is the substance and our present days the shadow, this the fruit of which our fleshly time is the seed, and that only when a prophet's words have opened our eyes to perceive this blessed life, and our hearts to desire it, only then do we live indeed.

## VIII.

### Charity's Armour of Proof.

(*Quinquagesima.*)

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I CORINTHIANS XIII. 7.

"Charity beareth all things . . . endureth all things."



WHY was the great Psalm of Christian love fixed on for the Epistle of Quinquagesima? It is a reasonable conjecture that for the Sunday on which falls the advancing shadow of Lent, no Scripture seemed more opportune than that which preaches how vain are austerities and self-mortifications without tenderness of heart, how dangerous is zeal without tolerance, how purposeless are religious exercises if they do not issue in love. So far we should find in Quinquagesima the balance and corrective of Lent. But the thought admits of being turned round. The relation may be viewed from the other side. If Lent has need of Quinquagesima, it may also be that the lesson of Quinquagesima will be ill-learnt without the wisdom of Lent; that Charity is not only a name for all things tender, attractive, warm, hospitable, but has in her true nature a sterner grain, less visible, yet indispensable, of a severity which associates her not alone with the more genial, but also with the bleaker of the spiritual seasons.

A hint, if it be no more, of this severer element may be discovered in the two traits from the picture of Christian

love which I have presented in my text. "Charity beareth all things." The version misses the mark a little; the word does not mean "beareth," but is a word adopted elsewhere to describe the staunchness of a ship's timbers which keep out the sea-water, the denseness of a thatch which shoots off the rain, the solid masonry of a fortress which the battering-ram cannot breach. It would be better, then, to say, "Charity is proof against all things." No wound of insult, provocation, taunt can pierce her; she wears, under the soft vesture, a hidden armour of proof, which turns every stab.

Then "Charity endureth all things." Again the word lacks precision. "Bides the brunt of all things" would be nearer. For it is a word of war. It paints the warrior's attitude, rooted to his post, waiting his foe's onset; the pose of soldiers in an embattled square, planting their feet, setting their teeth, as they push off the shock of wild enemies charging home. We must not in our picture of Charity leave out these traits. She is, then, not of tenderness all compact; she is gentle, but a fighter as well: no poor, bloodless faintheart, no spiritless drudge, no peace-at-any-price weakling. No, indeed; but a champion marching in a finely-tempered armour which keeps out the slings and arrows of persecution, threat, provocation: not easily stung or affronted. No: yet not because she lacks spirit, but because she has so stout an armament: the venomed shafts cannot gall her; they glance, and she marches on to her mark as a soldier on an enemy's position, receiving the fire, not returning it, till the true moment comes. Or, abandoning metaphor, Charity is not all sympathy, warmth, affectionateness; she has in her the iron quality of fortitude. Merciful she is, but justice tempers mercy in her; loving to friends, but she will smite them friendly with the truth;

believing all things, hoping all things, yet no dupe, not hoodwinked that she cannot see a wrong; slow to wrath, yes, but the precious grace of indignation is in her; tolerant, yes, but the fire kindles too, and in an hour of judgment she can speak with her tongue.

If this is a true ideal of Charity, how far is it reflected in the Charity which we know of and find in ourselves? Ours is somewhat an age of Charity; her temper is, one may say, rather the religious fashion. We plume ourselves on our liberality of thought, on an enlightened sympathy which justly estimates frailty and can interpret error; we suffer fools gladly, seeing we ourselves are wise. We are no bigots to hurry off the doubters to the heretic's stake (as soon almost we would give our own bodies to be burned), rather we compassionate the doubter and find his situation interesting. In controversy we have half abandoned rancour; we can not only take an opponent's point of view, which is good, but (which is not so good) we can discover apologies for public enemies, and palliations even for many villains. We so value human life, that in some parts of Christendom we fear to deprive of it even the murderer, and we think the secular hardships of life can ill wait for the slow ways of justice and common sense. Ours is an age of the tolerant, reasonable, sympathetic, philanthropic, appreciative, courteous. Who has Charity, and we have it not? who suffereth long, and is kind? who believeth all things, hopeth all things, and we not much more?

And yet if it were a St. Paul's part now to write a letter to men of our age as he did to those self-complacent Corinthians, I fear he might search out our self-complacency with something of the same holy irony which he uses with them. He might say that if Charity was greater

than Faith, it is so because it includes Faith, and that a Christian Charity ready to accord equal rights to all modes of human belief was at least a Charity which should not be defined as Christian. He might say that sympathy was most precious, if it respected truth and proportion, but that a sympathy with the poor which only echoed instead of instructing their prejudices, and was zealous to reform their grievances only and not their failings: or a sympathy with the young which forgot measure and differences, and withheld the lesson not to think of themselves more highly than they ought to think—of such a sympathy as this he might say, "I praise you not." Perhaps, too, he would add, looking at some exercises of Charity, technically so called, that here, too, some power of being proof and standing our ground against influences was needed for the true attitude of philanthropy: that there is little generosity in spending in a new quarter what you have merely taken from an old, and little wisdom in starving well-tested agencies of good because they are sober, in order to feed untried agencies because they are dramatic: in short, that a Charity is not enough which "believeth all things, hopeth all things," provided they are new schemes and imposing, unless also she "beareth all things," even the urgency of philanthropic novelties, and "endureth all things," even the impossibility of curing earth's old miseries in an hour.

Yes, an age when any virtue is the fashion is naturally an age when its degeneracy is to be feared. And it is easy to discern two causes now at work to impair the quality of our Charity. One of these is intellectual. It is a false security. We do not see what it is that we, by our easy habits, are giving away. Doubtless it happens with Churches as with States. The long immunity of a nation from domestic dis-



order will benumb (some have thought it our own case) the sensitiveness to civic danger, so that treason and anti-social violence are too tardily dealt with, because we have half forgotten, through long good fortune, that such things and such men can be. May it not be that the protective fears have been deadened for us in the moral and religious sphere? When persecution has become an old-world tradition, the dogmatic faith of a Church seems to need no watchers. When all round us men who dispense with even the Christian creed, yet live lives of virtue and good works, some people begin to think that to assert one's creed is a piece of needless and provocative militancy. They forget that if Christian principle seems so easy to do without, it is because it has done its work so well, and the age is living on the capital of accumulated good habits, ideals, and moral assumptions. But how was that capital stored? Not by tolerances, not by leaving things alone; no, but by wars of principle, by the slow discipline of jealous assertion and defence. So perhaps we are giving away, in our liberality, an inheritance brought together by our fathers with pain. How shall we answer it to our own sons?

That error is intellectual, a shortness of vision. But the larger cause which corrupts our Charity is moral. The fault is in the will. A man's theory (someone has remarked) is very often only the excuse for his frailties; and it is much to be feared lest our theory of large-mindedness be only an apology for a softness and luxury of the character. There are symptoms which point that way. Thus, we are generously impatient over even irremovable hardships of others; but then also we are highly impatient over discomfort and pain of our own. We boast of being more hospitable than our fathers were to new ideas, or to the ideas of



opponents ; but then are we not more afraid than they were of opposition in intercourse, more afraid of being called reactionary ? Among us certainly there is a ready flow of sympathy ; but there is also among us a self-pleasing emotionalness, and are we always able to discriminate them ? We are slow to pass judgment upon wrong-doers ; yes, only are we not slow in other judgments, and somewhat wanting in the hardy habit of making up the mind ? Reason enough surely there is for asking ourselves whether our Charity has not most need of Fortitude, of a readiness to endure hardness as a good soldier : whether she has not to learn from her sister grace, Faith, how to bear all things, endure all things. If that need be there, how suggestively does Quinquagesima stand at the door of Lent : how aptly is the Gospel of Christian love echoed next by the Gospel of Christian discipline !

Among our exercises of Lent, when we withdraw with our Lord into our wilderness of the Spirit, let us face and battle *our* temptation—the temptation to let our Charity become so wholly tender that she becomes less wholly true. Let us borrow for the matter of our prayer some links of that Apostle's chain of graces, only with its order reversed, with its climax inverted ; let us pray that “ giving all diligence we may add unto our Charity patience, and to patience temperance, and to temperance manly virtue, and to manly virtue—Faith.”

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IX.


The Trial of Joseph.

*(Third Sunday in Lent.)*

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PSALM cv. 19.

"Until the time that His word came, the word of the Lord tried him."

 HE career of Joseph is of the kind to which we give the name of romance. That word is a vague one, and it would cost us some pains to define ; but we all think we know a romance when we hear it, and the tale of Joseph is one. A boy of genius, hated by his brothers because he was of genius and knew it, led through startling vicissitudes of fortune, from a father's partial love to the estate of slave, from the black arch of a dungeon to the splendour round a throne ; then the marshal of a drama of poetic justice, apt almost beyond the devices of fiction ; last in a scene of rarely-equalled pathos binding up again the ruptured bond of home, and crowning the boy's dream of dominion over his father's house by a fulfilment as sweet as it was wonderful ;—what have we here but the very authentic stuff of romance, even as you would find it in an Odyssey of Greeks, or a tale of Arabians, or a chivalrous fiction of our North ? A Romance. Yet not for the sake of a literary quality in the story am I bringing it before you in the wake of this morning's Lesson, but because by virtue

of that same quality of the romantic this particular Scripture seems to me to be specially written for our admonition, and the history of Joseph to have happened unto him for our ensample.

It is an old counsel that we should count no man happy till we see his end. Often, however, in studying a story we look even too much to the end, and when that end is a happy one we allow its brightness to intrude into the dark midway scenes and to unfairly mitigate for us spectators the impression of their blackness. Not so the historian in this Psalm. He does not forget in Joseph, "ruler over all the land of Egypt," the woe of Joseph the prisoner. He has with deep sympathy fastened on the prison time as the grand spiritual epoch of the life. "Until the time that God's word of promise to him came to pass, the word of Jehovah tried him." How it tried him we can easily divine. We think of a crouched figure under a low-browed arch, the feet hurt with fetters, the cheeks paled with the sunless crypt, the prisoner's food, a sick heart conforming to the shadows of a hopeless place: and then we think of a boy of seventeen wandering on free hills in sunshine, dreams from his pillow haunting him, and with their thoughts of greatness steeping all his landscape in magic light. It has been said that there is no sorrow greater than that of a lost bliss, "that a sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things." But is joy remembered in misery really more bitter than hope despaired of? And for Joseph the crown of sorrows was, I think, that his prison gave the lie to the visions of boyhood. How could the dream come true if he was to pine to death in this dungeon? Did God mean it to come true? Had God (this is ever the prisoner's thought) forgotten him? Was this dungeon, by the grim, cruel

name of a later age, an *oubliette*, a place of forgetting,

“Where over him the suns arise and set,  
And the lark sings, the sweet stars come and go,  
And men are at their markets, in their fields,  
And woo their loves, and have forgotten him.”

Joseph knew men could forget him,—that the chief butler did. Was he not sorely tempted, think you, to fear that God also could forget? Ah, now we feel how shrewdly said the Psalmist, “Until the time that God’s word was fulfilled, the word of the Lord tried him.” No great matter to believe the promise when the sun fell on his limbs, and the rich dress that marked the heir was as the caress of a father’s love; not hard then to believe in a doom of greatness; plenty of young men of genius, and some who have little genius, have done this. “The difficulty is,” says a writer, “not to entertain this proud belief, but to keep it; not to have these lofty visions, but to hold them.” And it was a great matter to cling to the promise of Jehovah when the promise of Jehovah tried him, to keep the germ of hope unkilld by the chill prison floor, and dusky roof, and heavy shackle, and inhuman silences, to believe his high doom should come to pass when all things round declared it impossible.

“Change the name,” says a Roman poet, “change the name, and ’tis of you the tale is told.” Yes, Joseph’s tale is *our* tale. I called it a romance; and I call the moral life of a man or woman a romance. I know that is not the common view of it: to attribute to the lives of one’s actual neighbours and acquaintance the quality of the romantic is to stir a laugh at the incongruity; but I venture to do it. Romance is found, you say, where there is found the marvellous, the

rare, the beautiful. Yes, and have you enough noted the presence of the marvellous in your life? Not in your profession or day labour, very likely, not in your home, not in the society you keep; all things here may be dull, and shabby, and petty, the veriest prose of existence. But there is a region of your life to which the marvellous cleaves and cannot be separated. The moment you are in that region to which belongs the question, Whence came I? Whither go I? From what deep to what deep is this mortal journeying? the moment we have to think not of the trader or labourer or citizen, but of the spiritual being that wears the name which is ours, that moment our life is touched with mystery; we are brought into divine presences, hands not mortal beckon us, there are spells in the air to bless or ban, we hear unspeakable words, hopes unearthly descend as in fire upon us; ghostly enemies cross our path, ghostly champions attend us; we tread the path of a mysterious doom, there is a romance, or, it may be, a tragedy, of each soul of man or woman. Not often enough do we think of this; but when we do so think, I see not why one should be more thrilled by the romance which Joseph lived between home and prison and palace, than by the romance we live ourselves between cradle and life-work and the grave.

Well, then, is Joseph's prison also ours? That, too. And in it are spent the more part of our days. A prison not of brick or stone: a prison with walls of glass, and you can see through them; of air, and you cannot touch them; but the walls hold you caged as if they were iron or granite. The name of that prison is Life in the Flesh. There are bolts and bars in it; these are your human limitations. They said you were to be God's fellow-worker; but how little you can really go on any errand of His, so soon are you

blocked by want of strength, want of time, want of capacity. There are shackles in it: these are your sins, your lusts, your frailties. They said you were Christ's freeman, but how you are tethered by this clog. There is a roof to this prison: it is the pressure on your spirit of the visible worldly fact, which will not let imagination soar. They told you man's spirit is heir of Heaven, but you cannot see that Heaven for the vault. Yes, and they told you of a princely destiny, "Ye shall reign with Christ"; but that is belied by all that surrounds you now, by the gaol-dress, this vesture of decay, by the coarse furniture, by the stifling squalor of this place called earth. Besides, you have fellow-prisoners, and in their condition as in a glass you can see your own wretched plight; and the worst of it is they seem to forget that they are prisoners, or to treat the fact as if it did not matter. And you must take their tone, for if you vaunted aloud the dignity and value of the human soul they might laugh at you. What the Roman satirist said of the material life is true of the moral, "Poverty has no sharper sting than this, that it makes men contemptible."

Then among the shadows of the prison-house steals the whisper of the Tempter, "This is how things really are. That dream of yours about a holy life was a dream. There was a glamour cast on things when you were young by the trick of a religious fancy. Well, that was fancy; here is fact, this low ordinariness. Expect no more. Be content."

"The promise of Jehovah tried him." How blessed is it when this, the most universal trial of the religious life—the contradiction between our faith and the things which do appear—is felt by us, to remember that it *is* trial, that the promise is only trying us. How supportable is this world of appearances, when once we have seen that these daunting



and humiliating appearances are there only that we may have our chance of resisting them, of refusing to be brow-beaten, of asserting against them the divine assurance in our hearts that we are not what we seem, and this mortal encompassment is not the fact. What romance falls at once upon this humdrum commonplace of life, when it is recognized as our opportunity, our battle-ground of the Spirit, where he that will still believe is crowned, he that will not be conformed to this world is transformed by the glory of that other world. Why, then, we can go on being tried until God "lifts up our head" out of the prison of things that do appear. For God will lift up our head. Not only at the far great day of remembrance, when earth's prison-doors will be all thrown wide together; not only then, but earlier than then, and often, will come the hour of uplifting. It will come after the strain of resisted temptation, as the angel ministrants of Jesus; at the thoughtful entrance upon a working life when a consecration descends upon dedicated powers and solemn purposes; it will gird a man with ghostly strength when the Spirit of the Lord begins to move him to some half-dreaded enterprise; through the cloud of bereavement or of peril it will break on him with the stormy light of a mystic consolation; or perhaps in some quiet tract of life, without event, without occasion, unsought, un hoped for, uninvoked, it will come down upon the soul as rain into a fleece of wool, even as the drops that water the earth, and overflow his being with the assurance of an indwelling God.

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X.


Complacency Before Tragedy.

(Palm Sunday.)

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ST. LUKE XIX. 41.

"He beheld the city, and wept over it."

“E beheld the city, and wept over it.” The incident is a startling one, or must have been so at least to those who witnessed it. For what time was this for tears? Jesus is in the midst of loyal friends, the pilgrim host from Galilee, and they are bringing Him along, to the chanting of the hosanna Psalm, over a road carpeted with palms or the cloaks of devotees, half wild with their delirious hopes that now the King was come. What place for sorrow was here? And the sight which made those tears start, why should it do so? For suddenly, as the procession climbs the path on Olivet and on a terrace-rock winds round a shoulder of the hill, a glorious city, a wonder of the world, temple and tower and portico, with snowy parapets and golden roofs that flamed in sunshine, rose from the deep ravines that compass it, as it were the jewelled crown of all the land. Reason here why the heart should leap with loyal pride, but what for tears? Yet they are tears that break from Him who is the centre of this happy company, tears and loud wailing; and then, when voice finds way, a prophecy of doom, words

which paint to the eye as in a dreadful transformation scene, in place of the city's shining peace and glory, the darkness of the war-cloud—trench, and stockade, and grim foemen faces; instead of soaring tower, and graven marble, and glistening pinnacle, a ruin grimed with smoke and strewn with the dead—a city even with the ground and her children within her; instead of lustrous temple-courts echoing to psalm of Levite or pilgrim's hallelujah, a waste hill-top, no voice on it but the wind's, no one stone upon another to tell the chance wanderer that here, where he treads, once Zion stood, the joy of the whole earth.

So Jesus wailed. And which of those who heard Him understood? I suppose none of them. Distressed they were, no doubt, as children are who look up at a parent's troubled face, and catch their breath in sympathy with a pain or terror which they do not guess. Then their jarred nerves recompose themselves; the arrested triumph train swings forward again; the children among them, quickest to recover from a depression which they could least comprehend, begin again the burden of the Psalm of Welcome, and between silent lines of offended Pharisees the chant of "Blessed be He that cometh" sweeps them on, to disband only at the gate of Jerusalem; and which of them all, as He passes under the arch, remembers "If thou hadst known"?

But Jesus, who uttered the wail, was in the right, and they were wrong who forgot. He saw things as they were, not as they seemed. His was that prophet-power which is not so truly the vision of things future as of things present, a power which is less intellectual than moral, which in the sphere of the spiritual is the equivalent of the scientific faculty in the physical order,—the power of discerning in human history the reign of law, that necessity by which

effect follows upon cause, by which evil conduct must bring to pass evil fortune. He saw, and only He, how things really were with Jerusalem and its people, and therefore He saw what to Jerusalem must happen. So to Him the glowing landscape and the city shining on it like a gem were the illusion, and His doom-picture was the reality; the beauty and peace and glory were the mask; the features behind it were pain, horror, desolation. Jesus was right, and all He wept over came to pass in fullest and most bitter measure.

And the lesson for the anniversary of this burst of grief upon Olivet, what is it?

I do not know what lesson to find for ourselves unless there is some kind of parity between us and the folk of Jerusalem. Is it likely there is any? For their case is that of a grand complacency on the eve of tragic issues. Well, we of to-day perhaps would own ourselves liable to this error of complacency, but we do not believe in a tragedy underlying it. Neither, however, did the Jews. The tragic utterance of Jesus did not open their eyes. This disbelief in there being anything terrible before us, whether in our personal life or the social life of State or Church, this makes no unlikeness between them and us. Perhaps then our case may compare with theirs closely enough for the tale to yield us too a moral. But let us think only of the personal life. There the moral is most wanted. For you will find many more to chant Jeremiads about the future of Church or State than you will find ready to discern these severe truths about their own individual fortune.

First, then, the complacency. Is it not, in our personal life, the usual condition to be content with ourselves, even smilingly, even proudly content? Yes, content enough even with our frailties, our faults. Are we wilful?—it is our sturdy

spirit of independence. Are we selfish and grasping?—it is our practical, manly effectiveness, the characteristic excellence of the race we come of. Are we idle?—then it is our generous, spontaneous disposition, which was never meant for stupid drudgery like plain, heavy, workaday people. Are we sensual?—it is our genial humanity, our rich capacity for enjoyment. Are we censorious, envious, spiteful?—it is only that we have better eyes to see what is amiss in the world than some amiable fools whom we know. And so on, and so on; for man's fair names for himself are quite as many as his foul tempers are; and you may be sure that lives the most unsound and inly cankered are to the owner of them pleasant to contemplate, full of serene interestingness, and wholly unsuggestive of catastrophe. And Palm Sunday was ordained of old to break this sunny dream for us, to shatter our content by a piercing fear, the arrow of Christ's "if thou hadst known," to make us clear our eyes, as His eyes are clear, and, behind this smiling illusion of our house of life basking in prosperous sunshine, discern the tragedy that may be there.

Ah, but you do not believe in tragedies: they do not really happen, at least not nowadays, or not to ordinary people. That is a very common view of life, and it looks like a commonsense view, until we know better. But it can be brought to the test of fact; for there are records of what happens to ordinary people, there are registers as it were of human fortunes, and the fates of men and women can be scheduled in statistics. It is not at all impossible to know how many out of any generation destroy themselves by drink, how many wreck their health, or peace, or honour by other fleshly sin; and when one hears of a schoolfellow cast into prison, or living in lifelong exile, for a fraud, to which



a gambling debt has tempted him, or when there comes the horrible hurling down of some honoured name from a seat of influence amid the muttered horror or mercifully-guarded silence of those who know it, we realize that this undeniable catastrophe stands for many more than those which are marked by any record, and we tell ourselves that to keep life upright and unstained is not so simple a task, so certainly accomplished. These things happen to warn the wayward youth who thinks his waywardness is spirited or graceful; the sensual who tells himself he is but following nature's genial way; or the trivial, careless one who tells himself nothing, but just lets himself go, doing only what he must one moment, and the next moment only what he likes;—to warn them that there are blights and storms and wrecks for folly, and that these ill things are quite as "natural" as the frailty was. And Palm Sunday was ordained of old to make them awaken and perceive that life's early disciplines and opportunities for self-mastery are the time of their visitation; now is it that the Spirit of Good would gather them safe under its wing, ere the spiritual evil in high places, like the hawk in air, can stoop and strike.

Yes; but still how many of you will say you do not, for all that, believe in tragedies! "They will not happen, not to me, that is." And indeed you may be right. For such catastrophes are for only some, not all: there are plenty of sober existences whom it is quite idle to try to scare with such terrors. But if the tragedy of ruin is to be disregarded, can we also disregard another, the tragedy of loss—the loss of what would have been ours if we had known, but now will not be ours? Of these losses there are no statistics, no register records these; how should it, for we do not know our loss? But if we do not know what we lose, none the



less we lose it. The fruitful career, a blessing to many; the generous cause we were to champion; the noble love, the noble friendship that was waiting us behind some sacrifice or venture which we refused; the fair, chivalrous example which we might have set and have not; the quest of a holy thing, the pursuit of a mystic Grail, which beckoned us out, but we were blind—why are all these missed, if not because we failed to know the time of our visitation, the things that belonged to our peace, the gracious means of preparation, be it the discipline which broods over us like a cloud, be it the inspiration which whispers us like a wind? But we do not know them, and so they pass us by, and there is the tragedy of loss, even if we ourselves never see it. God sees it; perchance His angels; perchance in more than the fancy of the poet the spirits of the past lean over us mortals in wistful endeavour to make us comprehend—

"How couldst understand, alas!  
What our pale ghosts strove to say  
As their shades did glance and pass  
Before thee night and day?  
Thou wast blind as we were dumb."

And that we may be less blind to the time of our visitation, there is an anniversary, this Sunday of the Palm-bearing, which brings before us the record of that wail, startling the sunny morning, when from the terrace on the hill Jesus beheld the city of His folk, and wept over it, crying, "If thou hadst known."

## XI.

### The Tale of a Belief.

*(Easter Day.)*

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ST. JOHN XX. 8.

"And he saw and believed."

"**B**ELIEVED." How came it about?

As he lay asleep at dawn, a weary man, on whom sleep lay with the load of exhaustion after the harrowing alarms of Thursday night and the rending horrors of the day that followed, an eager knock had roused him, then at his door a woman's wild face, and behind her, just fetched from his sleep, his fellow-disciple, Peter. The two men glance at one another; John takes the signal, as at other times, from his energetic friend, and they are away down the street for the gate of the city, to look for themselves into Mary's strange news, or fancy that the tomb of Jesus has been forced. The younger man nears it first. Yes, sure enough, the tomb has been forced, the huge gate-slab is away, the square aperture is black against the face of the grey twilight rock. He reaches it, he stoops to peer under the lintel of the cave at the arched recess where two nights ago the dead was laid. "Ah! she was wrong: there has been no robbing of the tomb; there lies, as before, the dim white streak of the burial cloths that wrap Him. And yet—and yet——. But here is Peter,

pushing by me and going in ; he will make out this puzzle. How I sometimes envy that quick, strong, resolute way of his. Ah ! what ails him ? What makes him catch his breath, utter a stifled cry ? What, what say you ? Not there—nothing but the cloths ? Why, then——.”

And John, too, dips under the dark lintel, finds his eyes in the gloom, and he is looking down on a stretch of white draperies, lying as they had been laid, but flat, empty, no form within to lift them, and just apart from them, but in its place, the cloth that had been wrapped turbanwise round the cold, pain-drawn brows : there it lies, undisturbed by any touch, but empty, dropping in upon itself. No, He is not here, He is not. Then what ?

And the wave of a mysterious great passion struck him, straining every fibre, like one of those strange waves which out of a quiet ocean rush upon a ship of a sudden, and clutch her, and she shudders, shivers, and then lies like a dead thing for a moment in the trough behind it, all the force of the wave rushing through her timbers still : so swept that passion of wonder and insight through the soul of John. “ And he saw and believed.”

Believed what ?

Does it merely mean that he believed Mary's story now, that the body of Jesus had been removed ? A trivial meaning then, quite out of colour with the deep hues of the passage : almost a foolish meaning, for this was no case for believing, but for knowing ; he could see the body was gone.

But again, can it mean that John, here and now, received in him the belief in Christ's resurrection and the divine life which it evidenced ? Could it be ? For if so, why did he leave all his companions all those daylight hours still in the

gloom of their misery, a gloom only shaken and made bewildering, not cheered and lightened, by the perplexing tidings which this man or that woman brought from the sepulchre to street-doors in Jerusalem; and why was he one of those who at nightfall, when Jesus stood in their midst, were terrified and affrighted?

Nay, belief in the Resurrection it was not, and it was. The revelation of the Risen Christ had been made in him: he had seen it, but he had not yet discerned. Just as in the common act of bodily sight a new object falls upon the eye as a vague, unfeatured mass, and then, one by one, the details define themselves upon our consciousness, though all the while they had been as really and instantly mirrored by our retina as the mass—so with the spiritual sight of John. The Revelation of Christ the Risen had fallen on him as a whole; all the parts of it, its conclusions and consequences, near or far, were there, were in it, were already his; faith had embraced them all in that swift hand-grasp of the whole, even as the eye when it grasps the sudden mountain landscape grasps also, as yet unknowing, all its woods and lawns and rocks and seam-like watercourses; all the truths of the Risen Life, Christ's divinity, man's redemption, death's overthrow, the soul's new glory, all were in the hand-grasp of John's instant act of believing, all were there, though many days of wonder and the musing years perhaps of a long life must pass before the disciple knew what the thing was he had come to know.

Do we remember this year's paschal moon, how half a month ago there hung in the sky a thin, curving sliver of whiteness, no more? Yet within the circle traced upon space by the curve of that slight arc there lay, invisible or ghostly dim, the entire orb of the glory of the full moon,

and night by night the brightness broadened upon the shadow, till at last the whole broad shield of silver, always there, shone revealed to us. Be it an image, borrowed from the season, for the tale of St. John's belief. His belief, not yet a system of reasoned convictions, but only an awe, a wonder, a glorious surmise, a confident heart-surrender, was, for all that, belief: the faith, not perfect, nor even full, was already whole; it shone with the brightness of revelation at its utmost edge, and life's experience would surely roll into the beam of the Light of the World the dim circumference, till it was all one mirror of the truth.

The tale is of a deathless interest, for it is our tale also. The history of the faith of John is the history of how we believe. No more than he does one of us gather his knowledge of God by adding this and that piece of fact to an original blank ignorance or denial. No, the knowledge of God comes upon us all together, a whole, but vast and vague and almost featureless, so that we know not yet what the contents are of this knowledge, but only have the assurance that God is God, and is our God, and that all good is only in Him. This knowledge may not break upon us suddenly, as it did that day on John, or on a later day on Saul. Certainly it may come thus, with the lightning flash that smote the truth upon Saul in his strong manhood, but far oftener it has been resting on us like a luminous cloud since our first childish consciousness, the tradition of a parent's faith. But whether it comes suddenly, or has been with us from the unconscious dawn, the knowledge of God is a whole from the first; life's experience has but to unfold what is already wrapped up within it. Teaching, sermon, catechism; discipline, and freedom, and temptation; joy, and peril, and sorrow, and success—all these are printing on

our soul the inner lines and hues of the Vision of God ; but our soul possessed that vision from the first, only it knew not yet what it possessed. We had intuition, though not yet realization ; we saw and believed.

But all this is thought of not for the sake of psychology, but of practice. Let our lesson on the great morning of faith be this, that belief is a venture, and belief is a growth.

A venture. If anyone of us, as nowadays so many, goes travelling on through his years without the strength and inspiration of full Christian faith, through tardiness in making up his mind about religion because there is this and that difficulty, worrying perhaps for ever over a chapter in Genesis which will not square with geology (as why need it ?), or stumbling at a Gospel incident of which the proof is only of the historical and not the geometric character, let him remember that John believed first, and realized belief afterwards, yet he found his belief was right and had not misled him. There must in faith be a venture ; there must be a spring of our nature as a whole to embrace the truth as a whole. Then we shall know in good time the parts which made the whole. But venture we must. Do not then let us go without the blessedness of faith because we are too cold-blooded to make the spring.

And belief is a growth. When we have had the Vision of God not all is done. All that happens to us by the way is a discovery of some new part of the contents of the vision which was large and vague. When we lose a friend, or master a passion, or pit our soul against the world in some little encounter, we are turning intuition into understanding, realizing something about God which we had known, and yet did not know before ; the light is broadening on the orb of our faith. What warning there for the soul which goes



to sleep upon childhood's first beliefs! What encouragement to the honestly perplexed with difficulties! Belief is a growth: let it grow then, and, as man's stature outgrows its unsymmetries, let faith outgrow its disharmonies.

But this is Easter, and we must end with some thought that is all of Easter and the Resurrection. And let us go back for it to St. John, where we left him by the tomb. "He saw and believed." He, John, standing there in the twilight, the red dawn behind him, leaning against the rock with lips parted in the awe of a great surmise, as the vision of a world made new overflows his spirit, what is he but one of us when the morn of resurrection shall be our own morn, and on our eyes—yes, ours—wakened from the sleep of death, the age-long sleep that is but moment-long, there swims the landscape of new heavens, new earth, vast and vague, a wide, unmeasured glory, and not to be taken in, but that Heaven's day will be long enough to learn and understand what already we have seen and have believed.

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## XII.


### The Heart's Counsel.

(Whitsunday.)

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ECCLESIASTICUS XXXVII. 13, 14.

"Let the counsel of thine own heart stand : for there is no man more faithful unto thee than it. For a man's mind is sometime wont to tell him more than seven watchmen that sit above in a high tower."

"ET the counsel of thine own heart stand." Who that has ever known the pains of counsel will not thank the son of Sirach if he can tell us how to make up our minds ?

"A man's mind is wont to tell him more than seven watchmen on a high tower." Why this ? Why is a man's own view of what is best to do in a grave decision, such as of work, profession, marriage, choice of or breach with friend, or party, or school, or Church, more likely to be the right one than that of lookers on ?

Anyone will reply, "Because he judges best who knows the facts," and in such judgments as these the main fact is the chooser's self, his powers, aptitudes, character. Spite of vanity or diffidence, a man knows himself better than onlookers know him. Yes, a man best knows himself. But how does he know this self ? In part, no doubt, like all things else, by observation ; he notes where he has been strong, where weak, what tasks he does well or ill, what conditions

stimulate, expand, or depress him, what kind of persons he can influence, or is influenced by. Here are reasons which can be named, counted, weighed. But are they reasons on which alone a choice that commits the whole personal life can be made? No; you will all tell me that there is a self, deeper down than any plummet of observation and analysis can reach, a self which has no name, no values that can be quoted, no weight that can be appraised. Our besom friend cannot calculate this, for we cannot calculate it. As we stand face to face with some act fraught with wide consequences, which we must venture or decline, we become aware that after deliberation, has done its best, after the arguments drawn not from our circumstances only but from our capacities and known temperament have been mustered, estimated, distributed, the sums added up, the balance ascertained (God and our souls know with what weariness),—we yet know that all this argumentation is but a parade, an elaborate machinery of judgment for the drawing of a false conclusion, until the scale has been entered by that weight which cannot be appraised, the self which cannot be named, but only known. Something within me, something as inarticulate as the impulses of the physical nature, tells me that I can or I cannot do this thing, that I ought to do it or ought not. We call that something an instinct, only by way of affirming that at any rate it is not reason. But the cause why I know it so little is the cause why it is so convincing; it lies too near my personality to be an object of my conscious thought, and because it lies so near it is the surest index of what my personality can do or will fail to do. But this self, this secret of my personality, this chief datum of judgment, who can interpret but I? What friendliest and wisest counsellor can read off its monition for me?

Therefore, let the counsel of mine own heart stand, for only my heart can really know myself.

There is a second reason why the heart is the best counsellor. If in government whatever is best administered is best, in private counsel, perhaps, whatever is best executed is best. The wisest choice faintly pursued may be worse than less wisdom with more conviction. Watching the careers of the successful, one observes that their enterprises have prospered often not because they were so well planned, but because they were so well followed up; not because they were so good, but because they were theirs. Yes, in a choice, judgment is not enough, there must be passion too. But how can there be passion and the energy of passion in a resolve which is a borrowed one, which was hammered out on some other's anvil, not forged in the heat of a man's heart? There cannot be. The enterprise begun without conviction will relish at every stage of the coldness it began in, in which it was begotten, and break down at the touch of mischance. Let the counsel of thine own heart stand, for it alone has passion behind it.

Here are two human reasons for believing that a man is his own best counsellor: his own choice alone has the truth of instinct, has the force of passion. To-day we may fortify these reasons by a third. To-day we worship in special God the Counsellor; and I suggest, as a question for Whitsunday, What is the relation of our belief in a Holy Spirit to the practical decisions of our human life? Does that belief supply a new reason why our own heart's counsel should be let stand?

If there is one thing which we agree upon as to the operation of the Holy Spirit, it is that human character is the special field of His action. And if there is any result to

which our brief analysis of the act of judgment has brought us, it is that in character, not in reason, lies the force by which true choices are made. The instinct, which makes decision wise, the passion which makes it strong, these are modes of character. Since character is to judge, what assessor can be so fit as the Spirit Whose office the moulding of character is?

But this is not all. If the Spirit acts on character, He must prefer to do so at such times as are most critical. What time so critical as a great decision? For do but think what such moments are! All a man has been, is, shall be, is in them. The thousand yieldings, resistances, constancies of the will; the habitual moods of ambition, enthusiasm, or cynicism, which have steeped mind and temper in their colours; the unspoken loyalties, the unconfessed greeds; the fervour of old prayers, the heaviness of old sins; promises, pledges, boasts of the past, the prophecies that went before upon him—all these are mustered on this field of decision, the man's whole past history is conspiring for the true choice or against it. This beforehand. And after, when the word has been spoken, it is a word to make a man or undo him, a word that reveals, stamps, perpetuates his worldliness, greed, pusillanimity, or else fixes a type of noble action from which he will not dare to degenerate. Choice lifts his nature to a higher plane of effort or shatters it over a brink. Can we doubt if the Spirit of counsel and ghostly strength will intervene in such debate as this? If the artist selects for his canvas or his marble that moment of a scene, that attitude, which is expressive of the most numerous and weighty antecedents, of the gravest consequences, then surely He to Whom is given to mould again God's image in man will select for the masterpiece of

His art that moment of a soul which registers all the past and prophesies all the future. Then, if at all. If I am ever to know within me a Comforter, it will be when I face a decision.

Only *how* shall I know Him? What is the manner of this act? Which way comes the Spirit of the Lord to speak unto me? For He is not articulate, and He applies no sensible force. Can I think of Him as moving my will by a mechanical impulsion so that I choose aright, not knowing why? Nay, I recall how He was to do it: "He shall bring all things to your *remembrance*, whatsoever I have said unto you." To our remembrance. That is it. He will act not from without, but from within; not bring a new thing to me, but bring into light old things of the heart. That knowledge of truth which is in me, but how dim! that love of right which I feel, but how weakly! these the Quickener will make live; He will make experience present to me, make old disciplines and loyalties stir in the bosom; He Who is Counsel will thrill this nerve of instinct, He Who is Ghostly Strength will flush these veins of passion. The counsel of my own heart shall stand, for there is no man more faithful unto me than the Spirit of Truth.

Let me urge it on you most who are young, because you are young, and because your choices turn the current of your life-stream at a higher point, to put to the proof our faith of Pentecost. You are sitting alone in your room, or you have rambled away among the fields to think out some decision which will cast for good your fortunes. Slowly, scrupulously, exhaustively, you pass before the mind each element of the case, each power a given resolve demands of you, each opportunity it will close or open, each relation to others which it will affect; you estimate, you cipher out the



values of arguments for and against ; the brain aches, the heart is sick with strain ; the more is the labour of reason the less seems the force of will for decision, and a sad fear besets the spirit that in this mortal blindness he who chooses with the most pain may prove to have chosen with the least prosperity. But even then float down upon the soul words from of old that seem meant for this moment : "It shall be given you in that day" ; "He will guide you into all truth." Why, then, if into all truth, surely into this one truth which so sorely matters. And there perchance the spark falls, and the choice (you know not how) is chosen : "Thus shall it be : God wills it thus." Or if it be not given us so, yet on the spent faculties comes a dew of strength, a holy confidence : that trembling conclusion which seemed to struggle out as the true issue of debate, that wan and faint conclusion which we dared not trust while it was but our own heart's voice, rises before us now, consecrated and sealed. Yes, this way came the Spirit to speak unto me ; it is His word, not mine : the counsel of mine heart shall stand, for it is the counsel of the Very God.

### XIII.


## “*Vita Hominis, visio Dei.*”

(Trinity Sunday.)

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ISAIAH VI. 5.

“Mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts.”

“ HAVE seen God,” says the Prophet. He says it in terror. “Woe is me, for mine eyes have seen the King.” Woe, because he knew himself a man of unclean lips; the sight of the heavenly beauty made his human sinfulness abhorred in his own eyes.

But this is not the only way in which the sight of God is to be thought of. The sight of God is more often put before us not as man's dread, but as man's supreme desire; not his woe, but his joy. “The pure in heart shall see God.” “This is life eternal, that they may know Thee, the only true God.” “I have set the Lord alway before me, therefore my glory rejoiceth.” Then the religious poets find inspiration in the phrase of the Beatific Vision, that is, the sight of God which makes man blessed: and the more popular language of hymns makes it the description of future bliss that the soul shall lie before the throne and gaze and gaze on God; and one has summed it all up in one splendid phrase, *Vita hominis, visio Dei*—man's true life is the seeing of God.

*Vita hominis, visio Dei*—our life the vision of God—does that correspond very well with facts? You and I, who if we know anything must surely know something about our own life, do we find the words true? Do they not sound like the exclamation of some visionary monk or hermit at some rare moment of an ecstatic rapture, with a meaning for himself at the moment only, and a meaning for other men at no moment whatever? Think of all your neighbours, the men in the industries, and shops, and banks, and fields, the women in the families, the merry young folk, the staid business-ridden elders: one knows pretty well what their life is, and you will tell me their life is the vision of God! True, one goes to Church, and there one is told from a pulpit that to know more of God is the way to be happy; and sometimes one is led to join in a hymn which makes one declare the rapture it will be to dwell in the presence of God and gaze and gaze on His perfections, and the vanity of being “here in the body pent,” and the happiness of the fact that each day’s passage is a “day’s march nearer home.” But it is in Church one says these things. To adopt as a practical rule and motive for life out of Church the saying that man’s life is the vision of God, would be to take a very long step indeed.

And yet I think the man who moulded that high phrase was saying something that is true not only for monks and saints and enthusiasts, but for workaday people in office and shop and field and school. To see God, says he, is the end of man’s life. Well, and if this is not the end, then what is? I suppose, if most of us were asked the question, “Why do you live?” we could not answer on the spot. Life is mostly unconscious of its purpose, or rather life seems to be its own purpose. Why do I live? Because I

am alive. That is the answer which springs naturally ; and indeed one may go a long way on the earthly journey and not feel the want of any further answer. But so soon and so far as any one of us reaches self-consciousness, that is, begins to think about himself and to be interested in his own destiny, so soon and so far he wants to see a reason for his life, a worthy result and end of it. Now the aims of human lives differ infinitely so long as you try to express them in terms borrowed from men's material circumstances : one man lives that he may make a large mass of money, another to reach the higher offices of a profession, sit on the bench of justice, or command an army or a fleet, another to make a discovery in science, or to write books which will guide the world or thrill it, another to make a comfortable home for an old parent or a sister, another to exalt the credit and power of his native town, another to keep up the honour of an old family name. But it is possible to find an expression which will close within it all these endless varieties. This common expression, most people will say, is the word Experience. Experience is that for the sake of which life is lived, that is, when we leave out of consideration divine things and the future life. Experience—that means, of course, our consciousness of what happens to us, our knowledge of a world round us with which we have to do. Every sensation of our bodies, all the response of our nerves to sight, sound, scent, flavour, touch, every thought of the mind, every emotion and mood of the heart, every act which we do towards things and persons. To have this consciousness, instead of being dull, insensate clay which cannot say “I am I,” this experience is a good, though, alas ! a very mixed good. This is what life is for—this vision of the world. *Vita hominis, visio mundi*, we might

say. That mood of old Ulysses in Tennyson's poem—

"All times I have enjoyed  
Greatly, have suffered greatly. . . .  
I cannot rest from travel, I must drain  
Life to the lees,"

this mood is really the mood of the spirit of man as man. To be conscious of himself and of the world, to add experience to experience—this is life's aim, for high and low, for him who can feel his strong hand press on the frame of an empire, and for him who has no other desire than still to see the sun, and have the satisfactions of food and drink and sleep.

Consciousness, experience, the *vita mundi*, that is what man lives for. True, that is only a way of saying that what man lives for is—to be alive. But it is a more exact way of saying it. Experience is what the world offers the soul. And what a disappointing thing it is, how it often brings disgust, melancholy, disillusion, weariness, and the sorrow of the world which worketh death. Yes, this is what experience has to give us, until we make a discovery, the discovery of the believer, the discovery that experience is meant to be, and may be, no less than the vision of God. Has not His hand made all these things; are they not all, whatsoever things exist or happen, the outflow of His Mind, the embodiment in matter of that which God is? Shall part of my experience be the study of nature? What is it I am learning as I penetrate the laws by which grew this myriad universe, sun and star, stone and vapour, herb, serpent, bird, and beast? It is the mind of God I am reading, His thoughts when He said, "Let there be." What am I learning when I study man's doings on this planet,

which I call history ; man's state-making, and war-making, and empire-making ? The mind of God, His mind as Providence, His thoughts when He said, “ Let man increase and multiply and subdue the earth.” When I study man's work in art, and literature, and philosophy, what am I learning but how God thinks when He thinks by the brain of His higher creature, man ? And then when I come to know human character, as I do by living a life among other men, by dealing with them, by mutual help, sympathy, care, is not this to know the image of God, as He has suffered it to be seen on earth ? Ah, but there is one human character I can know better than any : it is my own. And when I study it, when I try to comprehend my life, nay, when I am living it, what am I doing but seeing a vision of God, learning that little part of His mind which is my single life's course, recognizing those lineaments of the divine image which can be read even in one human nature in which there is anything which is good ? And still the clearest vision of God has not been spoken of. For we are Christians, and bidden to look on Christ and know what He is, and to believe that he who hath seen the Son hath seen the Father, he who has seen the vision of that perfect lifetime has seen the vision of God.

Now do you see to what this is bringing us ? It is that all the living which you and I do upon earth, all that we do, think, feel, observe, remember, is but a way of coming to see and to know God ; is one means of the vision of God.

What a sudden glory does that pour upon the circumstances of a life, which generally are humble ! Humble let them be, but by them we perceive the divine. What a consolation it gives us ! For supposing we fail in life, as men count failing, suppose we do not get the good posts, the bright



careers, the easy or the interesting lifetime which we could wish, yet the hard, broken, prostrate, burdened life may be the beatific vision, the sight of God which makes blessed. Not what we do, or how we are thought of, or how many pounds we are worth when we die, make the successful man; no, but the eye which in life's experience, sweet or unsweet, can see God.

It is Trinity Sunday, the day whose name tries to sum up the knowledge of God, the day which comes fittingly now, when Christmas, Easter, Pentecost have told us each their special tale. If on this Trinity Sunday I could have persuaded you by better and clearer words than these have been that the knowledge of God is what we live for, that man's life is the vision of Him, *vita hominis, visio Dei*; if I could sow in your mind the seed of this belief; then I should be the giver of a good to you, for indeed I do not know what else can so light up life's ways when they are dark, or so comfort them when they are hard.

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## XIV.

### The Enlightenment of Ambition.

(*St. James the Apostle.*)

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ACTS XII. 2.

"He killed James the brother of John with the sword."



ANY of us know the Roman lyric with its thought,  
"There lived brave men before Agamemnon,  
many a one, but their names are buried in dark  
because they lack a sacred bard to sing them."  
And a quite modern poet, not long dead, will be most  
remembered for one line he wrote on the uncertainties of  
human fame—

"The world knows nothing of its greatest men."

It is a thought borne in on me when I think of St. James the brother of John, whose festival is to-day. For was not James one of the world's greatest, measured by Christian canons; one of Christ's Three, the equal of John and Peter; and yet what does the world know of him?

A great deal, you will say, perhaps. He left his nets with John to become a fisher of men; with John he got the name of "Son of Thunder"; with John he prayed Jesus to call down fire on Samaritans; with John and Peter he saw Jesus raise the little girl from her death-bed; with them he saw Christ transfigured on the mountain; with them he

was led by Jesus into the depths of the olive-yard to attend the agony. Here are quite a number of things we know about him. Yes, but what do you know about himself? All these things he did with another, or with two others. We cannot disentangle his share from theirs, and learn how he separately felt and thought, but can only think of him as that which he is here called, "James the brother of John." Of John we have a distinct idea: of Peter we have a still distincter; for, besides that each has acts recorded which are all his own, they have each left writings which reveal their heart. But ask yourself what you know of the character of James, of James as a person. You may guess much. You may conjecture that he was the complement of John, that he found the practical as John found the visionary temperament for the pair of brothers who seem to have thought and acted like one; that James, rather than the meditative John, initiated the fierce cry for the avenging fire; that it was his capacity for taking a lead which caused Herod to choose him for the sword. All these things we can conjecture, but none of them do we know. No writing of his reflects his thought or temper, no single act is told which is all his, and which can with certainty reveal him to us. The one single thing told of him alone is not an act, but a suffering. He was killed with the sword. He was one of the world's greatest by the rank which Christ gave him; and yet no one knows, or ever will know, what he was like.

This being so, I do not see how we can get any lesson out of his character, for we do not know what it was. Can we, however, find one in his career? Yes, that.

I think of the career of James as lying stretched between the two extreme points, one of which is indicated by the words of the Gospel, "Ye know not what ye ask. . . . Ye

shall drink indeed of My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with," and the other by the words of the Epistle and my text, "Herod killed James the brother of John with the sword." The instruction of the career lies in the contrast between the beginning and the end, between the ambition which found a voice in the mother's request, "Grant that these my sons may sit on Thy right hand and on Thy left in Thy Kingdom," and the sharp death which set a seal upon the answer, "Ye shall drink indeed of My cup."

Let us understand the first of these scenes, the ambitious request for pre-eminence in the Kingdom. There was what was wrong, and there was what was right, in that request. What was wrong,—for there was reason in the indignation of the ten at what they felt to be a selfish snatching at an advantage. But also what was right,—for can one doubt that the young men meant what they said when they offered to drink the cup and undergo the baptism? They were not intriguing courtiers, outmanœuvring their fellows, but young soldiers claiming a chance of glory, and honestly accepting too the chances of wounds or death, the bitter baptism of fire. It was not an ignoble ambition, this of James, it was only an unpurified one. Partly he wanted to be a great man; but partly too he wanted to be a saint. The rebuke of Jesus sets him to the task of severing the false ambition from the true. "Ye know not what ye ask: the leadership you covet is not the thing you fancy; first in honour, first in pain, is My Kingdom's rule. You shall have your ambition; your life shall be fulfilled, but not as you dream now." It was fulfilled; we know how. "Herod killed James the brother of John with the sword."

The instruction I am seeking for lies in the character of

St. James' ambition, that it was a mingled one, half good, half ill, half saintly, half selfish. There was another Apostle whose ambition was mingled too, I mean Judas. We shall better understand James' life if we think of him as the holy counterpart to the traitor. The traitor gradually purged away the good, and ended as the great felon of all time. James purged away the selfishness, till with gentle obedience he took the cup of suffering to his lip and stepped down into the waters of a baptism of death. The instruction lies in the mingled ambition which time purified.

For I believe this to be the commonest course which the moral ambition of any of us runs. We begin—I speak of those who do begin, but then I hope that they are not so very few who are ambitious of living life worthily—with thoughts and wishes quite as mingled, if not as lofty or venturesome, as those of James and his brother. When a young man is planning his life, and thinking that he is going to do God service by it, he is no more wholly saintly than he is wholly selfish. Things opposite but indistinguishable draw him with an attractiveness which is the sum of both attractions. The hope of aiding God's work elates him, and the hope of personal distinction elates him. He covets the task because it will do good to his fellow-men, and he covets it because it will bring himself pleasures by the way. It will be an offering to Heaven of his natural talents; yes, and it will be a delightful, genial employment of them. It will be a post in the Kingdom of Christ, but also a station in the kingdom of the world. It will bring him troubles, but it will take him perhaps to pleasant places and mingle him with interesting people. Hard work there will be, no doubt, but also praise; suffering and self-denial, yes, but how much love from those for whose good he toils. This is

the mixed scene which swims before his eyes ; the lights and the shadows, the good he covets and the ill he consents to, the rewards and the risks, the pride and the pain, are but parts of one picture, and he scarcely tries to distinguish them. He is asking he knows not what. Perhaps that is best ; perhaps he could not choose a life if its realities were nakedly clear, if its colours were not so blended. We are made of spirit and flesh, and perhaps this mingled prospect of the spiritual and the fleshly hopes is a kind of sacrament, appealing to our double nature, needful to our young, unpractised faith, enabling it to act. So Christ listens to our request, and looks compassionately down, tenderly loving and allowing His young soldier, and does not make us drop our imperfect, confused ambition, only says, " You know not what you ask, but you shall come to know " ; and then through a long life He teaches us what it was.

Yes, indeed we did *not* know. For how different is our experience of life from our prospect of it. Was there to be enjoyment in our work ? Well, it is less than we fancied, and it grows less still with time and age. Was there to be power ? The crown has many thorns in it. Was there to be intellectual interest ? Satiety comes, and disillusion, and a discovery of the exhaustibleness of human interests. Was there to be praise ? Alas, praise goes much by accident, and the clever, lucky impostors catch it on its way to those who deserve it. Was there to be love from those we work for ? Well, there often is, but how uncertain is the earning of it ! Besides, one comes to see that even love is not the thing for the sake of which we must work.

Aye, we knew not what we asked ; but we are coming to know. For this, which some people call life's disillusionment, and are cynical about, is no such thing. It is really



Jesus making us know, severing the false from the true, the earthly from the eternal. He is getting our heart away from the world to Himself, helping us to choose Him for Himself, and not by the help of that Sacrament of mingled flesh and spirit. He is crumbling away the unsound footholds of our life, that our feet may find the rock. He is drawing out of our grasping hands the lesser good which soon would die, that our grasp may close on Him, the good which is for ever.

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## XV.

### Temperament and Grace.

*(St. Peter's Day.)*

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GENESIS XLIX. 3, 4.

"Reuben, thou art my firstborn. . . . Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel."



MAN'S reputation after death is a very haphazard thing. History is full of minor characters of whom after ages have formed a very definite, but possibly wholly wrong idea, based on some single and perhaps insignificant incident in their career, or a chance remark upon them. The same thing may even happen in lifetime: sometimes a man or woman carries about through mature years a wholly false character, founded on some irrelevant thing they did or said in childhood, and which is the only thing their circle of friends remember them by. One wonders, is this the case of Reuben, son of Jacob, who has carried down the ages the burden of a name for "instability"? Does it perhaps misrepresent him? Well, we can test it a little, for of Reuben there are recorded a few other matters besides the father's most discouraging blessing.

But first, are we sure what his father meant by "unstable as water"? I fancy most of us think he referred to the weak and yielding nature of that element. We are wrong.

He meant "boiling over like water." He was thinking of a caldron placed on a fire of desert thorns. The blaze of the quick fuel heats the pot, and suddenly the water bubbles up; as suddenly the treacherous fuel gives out, and the boiling water drops again, flat, silent, chill. What Jacob meant to say of Reuben by this gipsy metaphor was that his was a spirit which boiled up readily, and as readily grew cold; quickly kindled, quickly cooled; a man of warm, sudden glows, rash spirits of passion, sudden and helpless chills and collapses. If so, it would be no wonder if he did not excel. To excel one must be able to carry things on and carry them through, not merely to start them, however hotly. Well, was it so with Reuben?

To-day's Lesson is the fullest record of any event in Reuben's life, the record of his effort to save Joseph from the murderous brothers. In that horrible scene he is surely something of a hero. Those nine who had made up their minds, against one of the very strongest instincts of their race and time, to kill a younger brother with their own hands, may well have been a formidable party for even an eldest brother to quarrel with. But the brotherly blood of Reuben boiled up at the proposal, and he risked the quarrel. Cautiously, no doubt, and not very honestly. One wishes he could have had the full courage of his opinion, that he had as eldest brother plainly forbid the abominable deed, "My life for his life: you must get past me to touch him." For then, besides saving the life of Joseph, which as it is we must credit him with, he might have saved his own and the nine brethren's honour, saved Joseph's freedom and Jacob's happiness. As it was, he was afraid of open opposition, and tried a stratagem. Pretending agreement with the rest, he suggests that if they compassed the boy's death by leaving

him to die in a dry well, they would have the advantage of saying they had not shed his blood (which in that case would be literally correct), and their consciences would be more easy, and their guilt more certainly concealed from Jacob. The stratagem was cleverly conceived; and if it had not been that Reuben was away from the meal which the Midianite merchantmen interrupted (very possibly preparing the rope with which he was to draw Joseph up at nightfall) his success would have been complete. The fault of the stratagem was that it was a stratagem, and not a direct "Ye shall not"; that Reuben's righteous heat just stopped short, carried him far enough to act upon a principle, not far enough to declare that principle. His generous blood boiled up, but could not maintain its warmth: the vessel was quickly heated, but too quickly it cooled. That is how his good deed was lost, or, to be quite fair, was half lost.

It is true that in dealing with a story conveyed to us by so few touches we may make great mistakes. Possibly we have wronged Reuben now by our interpretation. Certainly but for Jacob's sketch of him as the soon heated, soon cooled vessel of water we should not have read the story quite so. But this chance of mistake is not a serious matter. If we should be a little wrong about Reuben's conduct on this occasion, there is still no doubt that we understand rightly the kind of character he was. His outburst to his father, "Slay my two sons if I do not bring Benjamin back safe," attests by its generous vehemence the better side of the reputation his father fixed on him. We may safely take it that in Reuben we have the type of what we call the impulsive man, with the merits and the defects of that temperament. Whatever instruction is to be got

from the study of such a man may be got from Reuben. What is that instruction?

We do not come to Church for the sake of lessons in character analysis: for that object we should go to the novel or the drama, or the treatise on morals. What is our *Christian* concern in Reuben?

It has struck me that there is a Reuben also in the New Testament, and that in the likeness and difference may lie the instruction. This New Testament Reuben is not a shepherd but a fisherman, but he is generous, warm-hearted, strong in impulse, weak in constancy, he boils up and he falls cold. He asks his Master to bid him walk the waves, but he quails when the sea is boisterous. He becomes the spokesman of the disciples' faith, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God," and next moment the spokesman of their worldliness, "That be far from Thee." He draws sword on the captors of Jesus, and he lowers his colours at the question of a maidservant: he promises with a vow to follow Jesus to death, and he disowns Him with an oath. Peter is Reuben in temperament: yet Reuben was a moral failure, "he could not excel," while Peter was a saint and did excel. Yes, Peter as Nature made him was a Reuben, but as Christ re-made him he was a chief Apostle. More instruction than this I could not ask. As Christ remade him. The moral I desire to fix on the Old Testament story is that whatever be our temperament, too fast like Reuben's, or too slow like some others, Christ can so remake us that we shall not be failures in life. I do not mean that Christ *alters* our temperaments. He did not alter Peter's. The dissimulation at Antioch, the tradition of Peter's flight from persecution at Rome and his return to die, tell us that he was in natural make the same man. But the power of

Christ recovered him as surely as he fell : Christ did not let a faulty temperament undo him, make a failure of him. This is what we, with our faults of temperament, be it rashness, be it sluggishness, may dare to expect from Christ—that they shall not undo us, shall not spoil our life, if trustfully and patiently we will keep ourselves in those strong and tender hands of Christ. It is a great and deep assurance and encouragement if you will try it. Reuben was a failure : it was Nature's way. Peter, kindling and cooled as quickly, yet excelled : it is the way of Christ.

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## XVI.


### What is a Saint ?

*(All Saints' Day.)*

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REVELATION VII. 9.

"A great multitude whom no man can number."

" GREAT multitude whom no man can number."

This is the vision of the New Testament prophet when in the Spirit he beholds the gathering of the Saints. They are a great multitude; they are past numbering. Then perhaps you look at your calendar in the beginning of your Prayer Book, and you find the names of the Saints so sparsely scattered that rarely is there more than one to a single month. Perhaps your calendar takes in the Black Letter Saints, as they are called, those lesser worthies of whom our own Church has not thought well to provide for the special commemoration. Even so there is no multitude here, there is only a handful. We are looking upon a firmament studded here and there with a bright, particular star, not a heaven belted with a zone of light, like the Milky Way across our actual sky.

This contrast between the few Saints of the calendar and the multitude beyond number of the Revelation brings up before us a contrast in two uses of the word "saint," our modern use and the Apostolic use. It is surely clear that

when we give the name saint to such men as Paul and John and Peter we mean something quite different from what the same Paul meant when he sent a salutation to "all the saints which are in all Achaia." Clearly we mean by saint a religious hero, a choice vessel, a man apart. But Paul meant all the baptized and believing folk in Greece, men and women, boys and girls, rulers of synagogues, shopkeepers, or even the shopkeepers' prentices and slaves. Between these two uses, between the few hero-souls and the Christian masses which the names severally describe, there is a wide interval. I think we want a use of the word which should come between these extremes, which should be less exacting than the one, and more exacting than the other. Much less might be meant by it than an eminent worthy of the Faith, much more than a mere member of the community of the baptized. The word saint should describe anyone who has less than heroism and yet has holiness, one who is not only a Christian by the register of baptism but also by the fruit of belief shown in his life. If we said that by saint we mean a "real Christian," we should have the word I need; and then we should be in agreement with the writer of Revelation who says the saints are a multitude beyond number, and the feast of All Saints would seem to us more worthy of its name.

Now you will say perhaps that this is mere arguing over names; that names do not matter, for they cannot alter facts, and that we shall not make Christians more saintly merely by calling them saints. But this is exactly what I think we shall do. If we would realize that all real Christians are saints, and would call them so, I believe we should increase the saintliness of the Church of Christ.

There was a man who said he would believe in Christianity,

only, said he, "I never saw a Christian." Perhaps he never did. This, however, was not because there were no Christians to see, but because he had no eyes to see them with. What a number of things there are in this world, besides the Christian spirit, which have existed all the time and yet no one has perceived them, because no one had the eyes for them : there is the gravitation of the planets, the circulation of the blood, the facts of insect life and bird life, the phenomena of electricity. If all these could be missed by human observation for so many ages, I am not surprised at a man's failing to recognize such a fact as the Spirit of Christ in a fellow-creature. But we, whose eyes need not be blinded by the same prejudice as his who never saw a Christian, we must use our eyes and see the Christians who are at present passing unnoticed by us. Mind, I said "real Christians," not "perfect Christians," not even "excellent Christians," but "real," that is, men or women who live in a particular way, and speak and act in a particular way, because they believe in Christ. If we will look, we shall presently find one here and another there. We shall find a man who is refusing better prospects for himself because he wants to keep a home for a mother or a sister ; a woman who has given up a comfortable family life to follow the profession of helping the sick ; a man with an irritable temper or a proud one, who is behaving gently under provocations or humbly under insults ; a man or woman out of whose mouth never comes a bitter word or a sarcastic word about his neighbours, but only things kindly, true, considerate ; a boy who is always going out of his way to make things easier or happier for someone who needs such help ; another who, having the wish to be religious, carries his religion out, bravely but quietly, and does not mind if others think him odd. Now

such persons act as they do because of the belief in Christ that is in them; that is why I call them real Christians—not perfect, only real. The Christianity that is in them may be more or may be less, but it is genuine. You can see people like this if you will look about you; and when you have seen one, you will see another, and more and more, just as if you look up at the sky in the early dark you see at first glance but a few bright points of starlight, and then the stars creep into the sky and throng it till they are an exceeding great multitude, and all Heaven is full.

Does it matter, our being able to see real Christians in the world? Everything. What would become of our faith in Christianity, if we never saw anything done by Christianity, that is, if we never saw any Christians made by it? Trees are known by their fruit, and faiths are known by the men and women whom they produce. Not to believe in saints means not believing in Christ: to discern and honour saints of Christ, though they are most imperfect people and very like ourselves, is to make our own faith be alive and grow, and so to increase the saintliness of the Church of Christ. All Saints' Day is to help us to do so.

One word more. "Very like ourselves," I said of the saints. Will you let me remind you, on this festival of All Saints, of one saint, easily left undiscerned, whom we should each of us try to discern? It is the saint who lies hid, very often lies hid for good, in each one of us who are called Christians. In each of us such a saint there is, else all the talk of Apostles in the New Testament about baptism and faith and the grace of God is idle talk. There is the saint in us, but buried. It is in us, just as in Michel Angelo's fine saying, the statue lies already in the block of marble,

only it wants the sculptor to come with his chisel, and cut it out and set it free from the rock it is buried in. This hidden, buried saint is in every Christian, but it must be hewed out, set free, brought to light: the hewing, the freeing is the work of life's experience and the grace of God. But if we are to bring forth into light this buried saint, we must see him first. Is he so hard to see? Being a saint is being a real Christian: it is being true, just, temperate, reverent, kind; it is living one's life as anyone would naturally live it who believed the story of Christ, and thought that he too belonged to Christ. Is it too much to believe there is a saint like this within one of us? Do let us try to see this saint, and by the grace of God set him free, to be one more among that great multitude whom no man can number that stand before the throne and before the Lamb.

XVII.

St. Dionysius the Areopagite.

(October 9th.)

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ACTS xvii. 34.

"Howbeit, certain men clave unto him and believed, among whom was Dionysius the Areopagite."



THE 9th of October is the memorial day of a Christian worthy, Dionysius the Areopagite, to whose name in calendars is added the description, Bishop and Martyr.

The students of mythology and folk-lore tell us of a curious principle by which myths are originated. Some of the myths spring from the stem as it were of ancient words which have been half-forgotten. Later generations find in their native speech some term of which they have lost through disuse the meaning. They consequently think it must be a proper name, the name of a hero, a god, a place; and since it teases the human mind to have the name of anyone in the past, and not know who and what he was, men invent a history to match the name. Thus an ancient disused word signifying the sunset has given us the lovely fable of Endymion, beloved by the Moon-Goddess; and the name of a streamlet in the thirsty sands of Argos, the drear story of the daughters of Danaus, their crime and its punishment. I cannot but think that we owe to the same myth-pro-



ducing principle many of our biographies of the saints. The name of someone of whom only the name is known, or little else, remains as it were stranded somewhere on the shoals of Time. Then comes a curious posterity, and invents a history of the man. So we come to hear, I think, of the bishopric and the martyrdom of Dionysius, who heard Paul at Athens and believed. Certainly so it came about that he was confounded with St. Denys, the tutelar saint of France, that certain theological writings of centuries later were fathered upon him, and that he was said to have witnessed, when a student in Egypt, the supernatural darkness at Christ's death, and exclaimed, "The Godhead is suffering, or Nature is at the point of dissolution." No, I do not think these men of old had any grounds for writing his history beyond those which we possess. We are in as good a position as they were, nay, in a better one, to write the ideal biography of Dionysius the Athenian gentleman. Let us try. But we will keep most rigorously to the facts known, and what we guess shall be wholly based on them.

Now, without travelling beyond Luke's record, I can see plainly one thing about the character of Dionysius, and I can see less plainly another: I can discern something which he did, and, again, something which he failed to do.

When some mocked and others politely dismissed the preacher, a few stayed by him to hear more, and they believed him. One of these, and we may suppose the most distinguished of the group, was this Dionysius. Now I will be so parsimonious in invention and speculation that I will not even take it for certain that Dionysius became a Christian. The word "he believed" might mean something less than being baptized and living the life of full communion with the Church; and it seems strange if Dionysius

and the rest became fully Christians that we have no notice of a real Church at Athens continuous with St. Paul's stay there; though certainly in later times a Church did arise there, and is praised by Origen for its meekness and tranquillity. All I will make certain of is this, that among the politely-contemptuous crowd of well-educated, leisured persons, who made an afternoon's diversion, as a club of wits might gather for a literary symposium, out of St. Paul's discourse on Mars' Hill, there was one man of culture and also of high social position who did not follow the rest in dismissing the preacher with flippant courtesy as soon as they had listened long enough to be bored, but stayed by him, and talked on with him, and was not ashamed to take a warm interest, he the Athenian gentleman and thinker, in this humble-looking Jewish eccentric.

You see nothing in that, do you say? Well, try to see yourself doing as much. For, if I may judge of human nature from what one observes among ourselves, it does not look as if what Dionysius did were a quite easy and inevitable thing, which anyone can be reckoned on to do. Do all of us find it quite easy to openly express and show sympathy with someone who is in the right, but is not in favour with the multitude? Are we all so convinced that it is a man's duty to profess and act by his own true opinion and the prompting of his conscience, that we take our own line at the risk of being thought or called a fool? I know that our land is the land of free conscience, free opinion, where "a man may speak the thing he wills": that is our glory among the nations, that is the cause of our pride and our neighbours' envy. Yes, but somehow this is a national privilege which we do not always avail ourselves of; most of us seem to wait till they see what most people think, and

then they think and speak the same. Those of us who act so, would, if it had been we and not Dionysius on Mars' Hill, have decided, I fear, to join in the general laugh at the unpopular, queer-fancied Jew, and have gone away arm in arm with the bright-witted companion who was caricaturing Paul's gesture and accent, and punning upon his phrases, while in our heart all the while would have been burning the feeling that Paul was right, and we ought to have stood up for him. Now Dionysius the Areopagite did stand up for him, did go and consult with him, did at least confess an agreement with his notions, and did not forbear because friends would think him soft, and would ironically question him next day about his new philosopher and guide. Dionysius dared something in order to side with the truth. That at least to this extent he believed, whether he became full Christian or no, will have been counted unto him for righteousness by God Who judges hearts.

And what did he fail to do?

Here one is treading the unsound bridge of conjecture, for we have no certain news of what the Areopagite did when Paul went on presently to Corinth. But I fear our conjecture will be that not a very great deal came of his belief; so highly placed and cultured a convert would, we think, have otherwise made more mark on history. As it is, his story reads like a Greek version of the young Jewish ruler who made the great refusal. As the Jew could not bring himself to forsake for Christ his great possessions, so perhaps could not Dionysius forsake his heritage of learning, philosophy, literary leisure, and social position. A great moment had come to him, the Light of the World had fallen in a strong gleam across his path, he had a chance, if only he would yield to the strange impulse on his soul and follow up the

glorious thought which had stirred his pulses, a chance of being one among the makers of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth ; he, with his learning and his deep nature, might have been the Apollos of an Athenian Church, watering that which Paul planted. It was not to be ; the chance was but faintly embraced, the gleam died away. It may have left Dionysius a better, purer, loftier man than it found him : it did not make him a pillar of the Church of Christ. This, if one must guess, where guessing only is possible, was that which Dionysius failed to do. It is not said of him that he missed his life's opportunity, but one is left to fear it.

It is not said of him. No, and it is not said of any of us, when our spiritual opportunity comes by, and by faint-heartedness we miss it. This is a history which by the nature of the case is silent. It is not said, because there is nothing to say : and that is the pity of it. Nothing to say, because nothing is done. Do let us sometimes pause and think how truly in our lives is re-enacted the story of Paul at Athens. The word of God comes to us during a passage of perhaps very respectable lives, comes to us in the holy attraction of some man of loftier nature, or in the stir of a general movement in men's minds, or in the deepened thoughtfulness of a holy season. It comes to us, and in a measure we cleave to it and believe : we are the better for it. But we are not bold enough, we do not push on, we will not commit ourselves ; our spiritual future might have been made, if we only would fling ourselves upon our chance. But we tarry ; and while we tarry Paul passes on to another city ; the gleam that fell about us is gathered up again into Heaven ; the world, with its ways and thoughts, returns upon us ; and there is nothing more to say about us, because, though we might have been saints and makers of the Kingdom of Christ, as a fact we never were.

## XVIII.

### The Life Supplementary.

(*St. Luke.*)

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2 TIMOTHY IV. II.

"Only Luke is with me."



TO-DAY we commemorate St. Luke. What is the claim of Luke to be commemorated? It would be enough that a great proportion of what we know of Christ's life, and a vastly greater proportion of what we know of the earlier history of Christianity, is owed to Luke, who wrote a Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. The framer of the Collect for this day, who quotes (very probably with a misapprehension, once common, of its meaning) a description of him as the brother "whose praise is in the Gospel," selects the writings of the Saint as the reason for paying him honour: to him he is the physician of the soul, bringing "wholesome medicines" in the doctrine which the books deliver. And I suppose it must be granted that his two books, one of which is wholly indispensable, are his great gift and service, for which the ages must thank him and esteem him very highly in love for his work's sake. But just because this gift of his is so obvious and prominent, and unlikely to escape our gratitude, I have chosen to-day to consider another service of his, one which might very easily go unnoted and unthanked, though, as I guess, one which it would be very hard to overthank.



"Only Luke is with me." Three times only, and then in allusions only four or five words long, does Luke's name appear in the New Testament. But this one allusion puts the true stamp upon the life. "Luke is with me." Aged and weary, Paul is in a prison at Rome, a prisoner the second time, and he will leave his prison now only to be tried and then to be slain. His friends have left his side, Crescens and Titus upon missions, Demas because the world was too much for him. But Luke is there. The touch of one friend lightens the gloom of the valley of the shadow. "Luke is with me": that is the motto of the life.

For what was that life? Several things have been guessed about it, of which some are impossible guesses, and the rest are no more than guesses. We must not think we find him among the seventy who went out two and two on their mission, nor among the Greeks who asked Philip to bring them to Jesus, nor yet by the side of Cleopas on the walk to Emmaus. It is not unlikely that he was among those Gentile converts whom St. Paul admitted to the Christian brotherhood at Antioch, and with whom St. Peter mingled, till in a weak hour he was ashamed and avoided them. But we do not certainly see Luke at the side of Paul till that journey from Troas into Macedonia, when the change of a pronoun—"we" endeavoured, "*we*" came, instead of "they"—tells us that "Luke is with him" on an adventurous enterprise. He is not with him long, no longer than till Paul went on from Philippi south. For seven years Luke perhaps earned his bread as a physician at Philippi, and cared for the infant Church of Macedonia, then, if ever, winning his description as "the brother whose praise is in the Gospel throughout all the Churches," by his zeal in forwarding the faith. At the end of these seven



years Paul takes up again the old comrade at Philippi, and now the two are henceforth together on the fateful journey to Jerusalem, in the two years of Paul's custody at Cæsarea, in the wild voyage across the winter sea and the wreck at Malta, on the journey along the Appian road, and in the hired house where the Apostle was a two years' prisoner till the deliberate Roman law courts could find the time to try him. Then, at last, when after acquittal and an interval of two years, spent one only guesses how and where, Paul the aged is again in a Roman prison, the good physician whose loving care had all these years watched and protected and husbanded the health of a life the most precious on the earth, is still there to watch and guard and ease and fortify and eke out, by medicine or comforts, or only the healing cheerfulness of a friendly hand and voice, the last strength of one for whom to die was gain, but for whom, if he yet lived in the flesh, there was still a fruit of his labour. All other friends have departed now, some from necessity, some from selfishness; but one stays on: "Luke is with me."

The aptest moral of the life lies, I think, just here. While Luke is with him we know something of Luke: of Luke when away from Paul we know nothing. At the side of the Apostle a light of history shines, not too broadly, but clear enough, upon the good physician: when he leaves that side, at once he is lost in shadow. For us the value of Luke's life is that he, by his skill and lovingness, helped Paul to live his life. Paul needed that help. Those journeyings often, those perils of robbers, of waters, those stripes above measure, the watchings, and hunger, and cold, and nakedness, and all the while the care of all the Churches, would have strained the strongest frame of man; but this man was one who had to carry through life a sore infirmity, a stake

in the flesh, malignant as a messenger of Satan sent to buffet him. Who knows if the long tale of Paul's doings would have been to tell, who knows if all those Churches would ever have been founded, if Luke had been less a physician and less a friend, if Paul had not been able to relate along with the troubles and the imprisonments, also that "Luke is with him."

Here, as I think, is the truest glory of Luke, his title to be commemorated. He has been called "the brother whose praise is in the Gospel," and many people, following the blunder of an early Christian scholar (Jerome), think that means the Gospel he wrote. It means, of course, not that, but his services to the cause of Christianity. But I judge that Luke should be famous not because of what he did for the Gospel, but because of what he did for the Gospeller, the greatest of all Gospellers, St. Paul. His praise is that he gave up his own time and prospects in order to make possible the life and the life-work of another; his praise is not to have himself cast light upon the ways of men, but to have made it possible for a greater than he, a burning and a shining light, to hold the heavens, unquenched.

When one of ourselves is ambitious and wishes to be something, let him think upon the fame of Luke. For it may be with him as it was with Luke, that the true way to be himself something is to help another to be much. Indeed, as the world is made, this is incomparably the likeliest way in which a man can be and do something. We recognize that more easily perhaps in the case of one half mankind, for the wives, sisters, daughters of the race have set us examples enough of a life ready to live more to help another to fulfil his work than to realize itself. Yes, but how often must the same opportunity of service fall to the man, to the lieutenant

whose chief can get victory only by aid of his faithful skill, to the scholar whose obscure researches make possible the shining thoughts of a more famous man, to the handicraftsman who frames the instrument by which the master of harmony gives the world a music, or who cuts the optic glass by which a Galileo discovers new heavens. We, however, will rather think of examples nearer to our text. "Luke is with me." It may be your lot to help one greater than you to complete a life-work merely by being "with him," by giving him the company, the standing by him, the sympathy, the acknowledging word or look in his lonely time or his perilous, which may be all that is needed to help him to go on and not give it up. To have done so much as this is an achievement which should seem not unworthy even to the ambitious. If after-fame be any reward, the gentle radiance which dwells on the name of Luke was worth the unselfish life which won it him: and one of us has lived well if to the holy eyes there rests on his name a brightness like the good physician's.

## XIX.


### The Charm of Uncertainty.

*(Harvest Festival.)*

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WISDOM III. I.

"The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God."

O-MORROW is All Saints' Day. You are holding your festival of the Ingathering on All Hallows' Even. So with the task before me of finding some word for your festival, I sought to find a thought in which might blend the colours of both, the feast of harvest and the feast which remembers the just men made perfect. And while I waited for such a thought there came to my mind a landscape I had watched on an afternoon of that sweet after-season summer of a week before. It was the landscape of our uplands under the mountains, that mellow vaporious sunlight, bathing pasture and moor and shorn harvest-land from the grey hilltops above down to the dark splendour of the river below, brimming against banks of golden leafage: and here and there the sunlight seemed to fall with even a happier warmth on the gables of a homestead, where it stood behind its range of stacks, the piles of its gathered harvest-wealth. "There," I said to myself, "there is the image I want, there is the parable for me! Yonder homestead in the tender autumn beam, with the fruits of the year's toil safely carried and surely stored,

its wealth realized, no longer only hoped for, no more fear now because of unkindly spring or capricious summer, no more painful waiting upon niggard sunshine or scanty rains, no tremblings any more before chance of drought or drench or frost or wind or hail. Yonder homestead, among its yellow domes of plenty, the fruits that no longer are in the husbandman's expectation, but at last are in his hand—what a picture is it of something we all desire, and of which the day of All Saints wakes the longing in us afresh! That something is the peace of the harvesting of souls, the peace of that ingathering where the Lord of the Harvest is God, and where the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no harm can touch them more."

In the hand of God. That is where, one says, the saints are, the good and true men and women of all the ages, the good whom we ourselves have known and lost. That is where we hope presently ourselves to be. In the hand of God, safe as the garnered harvest is safe.

That is a condition we are all aiming at, or so at least we keep saying in hymns and other forms of religious expression. We tell ourselves that "a few more years shall roll," "a few more suns shall set," and then we shall be with those that rest, where there is no more sea and no more storms. We tell ourselves so; but then the thought will rise, are we quite sincere in chanting this aspiration after a peace and security beyond this anxious life? At times no doubt we are sincere, sincere for the time. Those are the hours, however (are they not?) when we are tired, tired with the strain of living, and our longing for the eventual peace may be no sounder a feeling than that of the man dead-wearied in body, who thinks there is nothing he will ever want again in earth or Heaven but just a sleep, one hour of blessed

sleep, and who would lie down and take it on a sinking wreck or under the muzzles of an enemy's guns. And perhaps to some these times of weariness are many, and last long. Life is certainly what the poet calls it, an "anxious being," which it seems as if we would easily "resign." Anxious with the anxieties, for the multitude, of mere living, of finding and keeping a maintenance for the body, for the household; with the anxieties for a few of ambition, of seeking or sustaining a practical success in trade, profession, politics; with the anxieties, for the religious, of the unceasing moral struggle, of keeping the soul with all diligence, of guarding the rectitude of the character through the snares, or the somnolences, or the sudden storms of passion of the mortal term; with the anxieties, even for those few who seem to live most sheltered lives and most exempt from the general struggle, the anxieties on behalf of others, those painful sympathies which reach our hearts with the generation growing up round us, the young whose struggle is yet to be, and for whom we know it will be so hard, and as we fancy, wrongly perhaps, ever harder and harder; so that the heart aches to look on at it, and a deep weariness of things as they are possesses us, and a sighing for the time when *we* shall neither suffer them any more nor even watch them. Yes, this life is certainly, as that poet said, an "anxious" being. We ought, no doubt, to long for the harvest of souls, the day of ingathering, the security of the just men made perfect, the rest of the saints. Only, do we?

Ah! one remembers how that poet called it not only "anxious." It is a "*pleasing* anxious being," which we shall "resign," he says: it is a "cheerful day" whose precincts we shall leave. And that is true. Even Life the anxious has in it that which pleases. The uncertainty



which one while we think the very poison of life, is yet the salt of life. Where would be the zest of tillage, the pride of husbandry, the joy of harvest, if the crop was safe all along, if there were no unseasonable frost, no incalculable storm to reckon with? And where would be for us, mortals as we are, the stir of the blood, the bound of the heart, the kindling of the spirit; where would be the soul's adventurousness, the romance, the magic and witchery of a spiritual ambition which call the young heart out after them, "the Gleam" which he must follow, and which does not, I think, desert the path of the foot when it grows slow, or fade from the eyes that are sunken with age—where would be all these if the future of the mortal were clear, if the end were sure? Nay, could life be lived at all, would its pains and tedium be accepted and persisted in, if the course could be measured and scanned beforehand, and were not shrouded in a mist? One has to admit that this uncertainty and insecurity is the moral machinery by which mortal existence goes on; change and chance and doubt and guess and hazard are the wheels and springs which move the world along.

Now, if this is so, are we quite sincere in picturing our final existence as a state of sheer security and repose? It is worth while asking ourselves what our hopes really are, because in our hopes of the future there lies an argument as to the nature of that future. It is one argument only, one among many, and one which will weigh very differently with minds differently predisposed; but an argument it is. We cannot but think it probable that some correspondence exists between the seen and the unseen world, the present and that which will complete it. But if there is such a correspondence, then if our natures here and now are so framed that they find their satisfaction in a particular kind of existence,

whether it be repose and security, or, on the contrary, exertion and uncertainty, we have a reason for expecting that this kind of existence will be also the heavenly kind. It matters, then, I say, what our sincere hopes really are. What shall we say of the fact that, so far as we know ourselves by experience, what our natures truly desire and need is not security but its opposite, uncertainty; while at the same time uncertainty, in its human form of anxiety, is life's pain and curse, and seems therefore impossible in Heaven, if Heaven is a happy place?

Men have too long tried their hands at raising the curtain which shuts the future off to allow us to hope it will ever be lifted. But yet in our mortal existence there is a fact which suggests a solution of our problem.

"The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them." How fully this is sometimes realized on this scene of earth! There are hours when the soul is under uncertainties which might well be torment, so keen are the pains and dangers which one issue of them may involve; and yet the soul feels that it is not in torment. The doom hangs, and O what difference how it shall fall! Yet in that waiting soul there is peace, and not peace alone: there is even a strange, glorious joy thus to lie in the hand of God, our eyes veiled, but our will bent up to embrace whichever doom shall fall to us as the gift of the Eternal, in whose palm we lie hidden. Fear is dead, shrinking is steadied into resolve, desire is transfigured into faith; uncertainty has become no longer a torturing flame, but a blissful element wrapping us round with the love of the Father: our perilous poise has become the hushed vantage-point from which the soul looks out on the vision that maketh blessed. These are moments when if it

were offered to us to know how the future should be, we would refuse. We would rather rest in this blissful incertitude. "Master," we cry, "it is good for us to be here"; here we are in the near touch of God.

And I ask, may there not lie in this experience of earth a prophecy of Heaven, a prophecy which reconciles the human longing for rest with the need, also human, of uncertainty? May it not be the bliss of just men made perfect that this experience is their abiding mood, not the glimpse of a moment? Our wistful souls, contemplating the state to be, yearn for a time when life's anxieties shall drop off us; but they would not that life's romance dropped from us too. It need not drop. The harvest of souls shall be no storage of fruits, once threatened with tempest, and now gathered in to a changelessness safe but dead. Still there shall be husbandry having its joys because it has its hazards; there shall be effort still, and venture still; hope and wonder and romance shall follow us; the unknown, the uncertain shall be with us, to be not life's poison but its salt: for we shall know ourselves there to be always in the hand of God, where there shall no torment touch us.

## XX.

### *An Answer by Fire.*

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I KINGS XVIII. 24.

"The God that answereth by fire, let him be God."



WE have just been reading the scene on Carmel, a wonderful scene, and painted by a master dramatist. How varied the forms are, how expressive their action, how intense are the hues of passion! The sullen king cowed by the rebel preacher; the priests of Baal, pale and furtive, artificially defiant, secretly desperate; the multitude without mind or will, glad of an ordeal which will make up their minds for them; and then, one against the world, the gaunt hermit prophet of Jehovah. And he! With what mastery he controls the whole tremendous drama, dictating, marshalling, accenting with his ironic laugh the vanity of the dervish dance, the self-woundings, the importunate litany—till he stills all hearts with his "Come near unto me," builds his altar, lifts eye, reaches hand, casts on air the voice which puts Faith's future to the touch:—and the fire of the Lord fell, and Jehovah offered His prophet sacrifice, and the Lord He is the God, the Lord He is the God.

But we read such things not as dramas, but as lessons. What is to us the value of this ordeal of the God that answereth by fire?

Ask first what its value was to them. Why did it convince Ahab's people? There was more in it than the wonder of it, or the splendour. The argument to their faith ran in this wise, "We have offered a sacrifice as to our God: but this offering might be only an act on our part, not proving a God able to receive it. But He has taken part in that act; He has sent His fire to kindle the flame, He has made the sacrifice to be offered. Therefore a God there is. The God Who completes man's sacrifice, the God Who answers by fire, He is the God."

So taken the ordeal on Carmel is not merely a wonder, a sign suited to impress childish men of old, it is an ordeal by which we can be convinced, our faith stands on the issue of whether ours is a God Who answereth by fire.

What are the grounds of our belief? They are many: they are the Bible story, the history of the Christian Church, the reasonableness of the Christian faith: but there is a ground stronger than any, it is the ground of personal experience. We believe in our God because we know what He does in us. We know Him as the helper, the guide, the consoler, the deliverer. But most and best of all we know Him as the God Who makes our sacrifice to burn.

Our sacrifice, what is that? Everywhere and always sacrifice is the same thing, it is the giving something to God. The subjects of King Ahab gave a sheep or an ox from their herd. We give ourself, our life. It is the beginning and the end of faith, this giving of self. That is the reason why faith saves, why it unites us to Christ: faith is giving self to God.

Very well. We have made, so far, the sacrifice. We have promised to give ourself to God: built the altar,

laid the wood in order, placed our gift upon it. Yes, but how do we know there really is a God to Whom we can give it? How do we know our offer is not a mistake, there being no one who can receive it? An ox was laid on the billets for Baal, but there was no Baal for all that. Else Baal could have reached a hand and fired the faggots. How are we sure that our God is more real than Baal?

We are sure because we find that God answers by fire, we find that God makes our altar flame to burn, God completes our sacrifice, God makes us to carry out the offering of our self.

Perhaps it came about this way. In early life, quite early life, for a boy or a girl it happened that a vague, unshaped, wistful feeling of living for Christ, instead of for pleasure and honour, suddenly took shape; we saw our life, the right way of it, the task for God, and we loved it with a generous passion; the spark had fallen from Heaven, and the heart was aflame. God had offered the sacrifice; we knew He was the God.

It does not always happen that way. If it does, still that is not enough. The man or woman betrays the boy or girl, letting worldliness steal away the first love. Yes, but the fire of God falls to renew the sacrifice. Tell me how it comes that season by season the old purer longings for service and self-offering revive, for no cause we can trace, and we begin afresh. It is God completing the sacrifice, God fanning again the flame.

Nay, God's fire can fall even to recover us. Our sacrifice is failing, say, not for want of tendance, of stirring, or fanning the fire. Much worse. Worldliness has come on us like a flood, sin burst on us in a storm; the drenching water has soaked the wood upon the altar. It never can



burn any more, we say. Nay : the fire of the Lord falls and licks up the water that was in the trench. The Lord who answereth by a fire that can inflame again our sin-sodden hearts, surely He is indeed the God.

Last, God's fire is with us to help us persevere, continue unto the end. Is it not so? Answer it to yourself, you who are halfway through a life-task, which you took up with joy, but are carrying on by patience only ; you who rejected some of the world's prizes for duty's call, and now are feeling the cost ; you who had ideals in youth, and find it hard to keep them, when time, and disappointment, and weariness are trying to laugh them down : you who vowed to be true mother, or nurse, or elder sister, or guardian, to those whom the Lord gave to your hand, but the task is heavy and endless, and the glory falls away from it. Answer it you, as you find. Is it not so? There is a touch comes from somewhere, and will not let go out the fire upon our heart. God answereth by fire : let Him be God.

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## XXI.

### Hope.

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I CORINTHIANS XIII. 13.

"And now abideth faith, hope, and charity, these three."



FAITH, Hope, Charity. Nothing is more familiar than this triad of the Christian virtues. But have not we sometimes wondered why Hope should be among them, and one of only three. For, one says, how is Hope a virtue of any kind at all? Hope means expecting something. Now you cannot expect anything unless you have some reason for doing so. You cannot make yourself expect; and if you have the reason you cannot help expecting. So where is the merit of having Hope, and where is the fault of not having it? Why is it a virtue? It looks more like a clear gift, such as a quick brain, or a strong constitution, or a steady nerve, or a naturally even temper.

And yet, if you think of it, we do make hopefulness a matter of praise in other things than religion. We think it rather a discredit to the player of a game if he is ready to despair of winning, and fails in consequence to play an uphill game with spirit; and we admire in a boy or young man his bright confidence of doing something successful and honourable in life. We may make excuses for the despondent and unhoping, but we do not admire them. And the

reason why is very instructive for our present purpose. It is that Hope is a great power to help us win a game or succeed in an enterprise in life. Hope is exceedingly useful in life ; therefore we admire hopefulness. Perhaps Hope is useful in religion, and therefore is a virtue.

Let us try to see how it is useful. It is not for nothing that St. Paul has put it *between* Faith and Charity. In the group of three perhaps it is the link which binds the two others. Let us ask what it has to do with Faith, and what with Charity.

Now as to Faith the question commonly asked is, what has Hope *not* to do with Faith. One thinks, how do they differ ? What is Hope but just a kind of faith ? And one very great thinker among early Christians, St. Augustine, setting out to answer this question, tells us the difference is that Hope is about things in the future, and things which are good, and which concern the man who feels the hope. This, however, will not quite satisfy our minds, for it seems only to say that Hope is faith applied to a particular kind of objects, whereas one thinks the difference between the two should be a difference of quality : Faith should be one temper of the spirit and Hope another. Now it seems to me both true and suggestive to say that Hope differs from Faith in that while both are states of belief about things unseen, Hope is a happy and buoyant belief, not a merely firm and determined one. It touches Faith with the touch of joy, of pleasure. Its gift to Faith is a gift of beauty. Faith unattended by Hope might be strong and constant, but it might also be drear, grim, sullen, fanatical ; but Hope brings to her notes grace, brightness. Thus the Jew before Christ came had faith in God, so that as to the future after death he trusted that God would do for his soul

what was best, but he knew not what that best was ; it might be extinction, or it might be another existence. But the Jew become a Christian had not only this unshaped trust : a vision of a future existence, sure and beautiful, had unfolded before him now. To his faith, hope was added. It was to him as it was to his forefathers by the Red Sea. His faith was a cloudy pillar of God leading him on the divine path, a pillar of cloud, visible yet cold and grey : then a change comes on it, the cloud-pillar kindles, it breaks into flame. That is Christian faith that brightens into Christian hope.

Now when on the other hand we come to connect Hope with the other sister grace, Charity, our difficulty is quite an opposite one. For here the difficulty is not to show the distinctness between the two, but rather to show that there is any likeness at all. Still, here again I feel sure it will be found that the three graces are bound up in one another, three divers rays into which the divine light separates itself as it passes through the prism of mortal nature and circumstance. And this much I think I can see at once. It is that as faith without hope may be strong but would not be beautiful, so love without hope may be beautiful but is not strong. Hope stands between the two, and to one she ministers beauty, to the other she ministers strength.

Ministers strength. I am thinking of such a thing as the following. There is in our modern world a good deal of what St. Paul would call Charity, but which some people would rather call Philanthropy, or the newer name still, Altruism, *i.e.*, desire for the good of others. This is a commoner sentiment than it used to be ; the serious question is, " How long will it last ? " I should be inclined to answer, " As long as hope lasts, or only a little longer." I do not

believe that if people despaired of the future of the world they were trying to help, or the class, or the persons, they would really go on for long caring about them. I seem to notice that even those people who aim at helping their fellow-men, but without professing the hopes which Christians profess, that even they have before them some kind of hope of their own, a dim, thin, dreary hope we may think it, but still a hope. Some idea of a happier goal towards which they can move humanity, of a wholesomer, easier condition of things, is the strength of those who love mankind, even though they say they know not Christ. The difference only is that the hope is a less glorious one, and the strength it gives is not so strong. We who discern in Christ a golden goal fixed before our race, we who think that whatever love and pains we spend on a fellow-man is spent on a being whom God wills to be saved, who has the seed in him of immortality, and whose life therefore may yield through ages beyond our imagination the fruits of our kindness, toil, faithfulness, are we not made strong to love by that expectation : does not our friend, or child, or comrade, or pupil, or dependent seem worth the continuance, the steady, unselfish, loyal continuance of our pains, because before him lies the eternal hope ?

Hope the minister of strength. When I think of the virtue called Hope two pictures come to my mind. One is the work of a great living painter : it is a piece of symbolism, a gracious, frail, pathetic figure, the eyes blinded with a veil, the head bent and turned on one side with the intentness of a listener to catch the music sounded on the one unbroken chord of her lyre on which all strings but this are gone. A touchingly beautiful conception : but this is human hope not divine. The other picture is the very

familiar one which may have met your eye on many a Church window—a figure not pathetic, weak, forlorn, but strong and brave as Fortitude ; and in her hand not the lyre of broken strings, but the stout shaft and the iron grappling hooks of her mighty anchor ; the anchor which entereth into that within the veil, the deeps of the world unseen, and from thence, whatever storm may swing their surface, holds the soul fast.

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## XXII.

### Tares and Wheat.

ST. MATTHEW XIII. 27.

"Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in this field? from whence then hath it tares?"



PARABLE of Christ, like every living word of man, inspired or uninspired, may have other interpretations than the first and the commonest.

The first interpretation of the parable of the Tares is well agreed upon. It is a warning to the zealot and the bigot, to people who think that if in the Church of God on earth there are unworthy members, the proper course is to weed them out. And the standard example in Church history of this class of people is the sect of people in the early days who were called the Donatists, who separated themselves from the Catholic Church into a new and narrow community of their own because, as they said, the Catholic Church was not holy enough: it tolerated the existence in it of Christians whose faith and conduct was below the best standard, and refused to excommunicate them. In later days, and in this country not less than elsewhere, the same mistake has been witnessed, of groups of believers breaking off from larger bodies, because those larger bodies seemed to them too lax. And the result has, I believe, not been happy; has not ended in a nobler religious life, but only in

a narrower. Also, at all times and in all Churches, there will be found the vehement, one-sided religious person who has no patience with the imperfection he sees round him, and is ready, in his own secret judgment at any rate, to write out from the true Church, and condemn as a heathen, anyone who is weak, or half-hearted, or cannot go all the way with him in his doctrine. That kind of person ought, no doubt, to study the parable of the Tares, and learn how to leave alone.

But I do not think this kind of person is very common. The zealot is one in a thousand. If the parable is only for him, its students would seem almost too few. Also I observe that Christ, when He interprets every other detail of the similitude (the field, the wheat, the tares, the householder, the enemy, the reapers), says no word about the servants. Does not that suggest to us to look more broadly at the parable? I try to look at it so, and then I seem to find that the heart of the teaching lies in the fact that the field was a mixture of wheat and tares, and had to remain a mixture till the end. From that I learn that Christ's Church, His Kingdom on earth, is also a mixture of good and bad, and such a mixture it must remain. That is the thing intended to be said. From that we are to draw conclusions as to conduct. One conclusion is, "Do not be a bigot." But there may be others, and of these I will try to point out one.

I discern two other kinds of persons, besides the zealots, who are likely to be drawn into mistake by the discovery that in Christ's Church on earth the good are mingled with bad.

The servants of the householder came and asked him, "Wilt thou that we go and gather up the tares?" That

was because they were zealous servants. But they might have been sluggish servants, or despondent servants. Then they would not have gone near their master at all; they would have looked over the wall a little, then sampled a few square yards of field to see how thick the tares grew, and gone off saying, "Well, there's a lost crop: no use to spend our labour over that; we give it up."

That is how some of Christ's labourers are tempted to behave when they realize what a mixed, unholy body is this Kingdom of Christ on earth. The lonely pastor despairs of his flock, and lets his energy leave him, because there are in his flock, after much work of his, so many stolid ones, so many ne'er-do-wells, so many who care nothing. The man of reflection and character retires from politics, or other forms of public life, because the scene is so much cumbered with selfishness and vulgarity and pretence. The teacher loses heart, because hearers who have ears to hear are so lost among the dull who have not. The philanthropist goes back to look after his own affairs instead of other people's, because, among the masses, the hypocrite, the ingrate, and the incurable seem to have more than half the field to themselves.

If they could hear a divine voice saying, "This was bound to be: this need not surprise you: both must be together till the harvest, and still the field is worth tilling," they might take heart again, and go on.

That, then, is one kind of man for whom the parable is—the easily discouraged worker. There is another.

One can imagine a stranger looking over the wall of that field. What would he see? The wheat and the tare, as is well known, are exceedingly like, so long as they are both in the blade only. It takes a farmer's eye to tell one from

the other. Later, when the ear is formed, any child may tell them. The stranger at this time might look over the wall and say, "That is no wheat crop; that is a wilderness of tares."

And those of us whose eyes are not well trained to discern good and evil sometimes come up to look on Christ's harvest field, and seeing the bad so thickly mingled with the good, and the good themselves so hard to distinguish by outward marks, we say to ourselves, "This is no Kingdom of God; these are no saints that fill it; these are sinners, most or all; and, for all they say about it, here is not Christ's Kingdom, but the world."

I am thinking of some man or woman who perhaps has never before thought very seriously for himself, but only accepted from others the idea that the Church of Christ is a society of the believers in Christ, but suddenly one day stops to reflect, and see things for himself, and thereupon, noting how of those who call themselves Christian a vast proportion are selfish, money-seeking, worldly-minded, loose-living folk, who never seem to act upon any other maxims than a pagan of the Roman Empire might have steered his course by, and noting too that it is very difficult to distinguish for certain the lofty-minded from the multitude, passes in his heart the secret judgment that religious profession is a sham, and only a fine name under which to do as the world does.

And I am thinking of some young man, hesitating in the choice of his profession between a secular career and the sacred ministry. And he says to himself, this so-called sacred ministry seems to me full of men who have little enough sacred about their lives; men who took Holy Orders because their friends advised it, or because there was a

family living, or because it was their easiest road to a competence ; men who were careless, selfish fellows enough at college ; unworthy men, who do not practise what they preach ; dishonest men, who do not believe what they preach ; idle men, who will not preach what they believe. I do not care to become one of a body in which such persons are so common.

And I am thinking of some boy, whose conscience or a friend prompts to be more diligent in matters of religion. And he says to himself, " Is religion so very useful ? Look at some of those who pass for religious. There is such a one ; he would be called religious, but he doesn't speak the truth. There is such another ; he is a rather regular Communicant, but well I know he is not as good as he should be. If this is religion, I do not see why I should take trouble about it."

But they all are wrong. They are people looking over the wall, who see many tares in the field, and go off saying there is no harvest there. But the Lord of the field would answer them, " An enemy hath done this ; but the true wheat is there no less. It must be thus : both *must* grow together until the harvest. The Church of Christ is full of those who are no Christians, and yet it is Christ's Church ; the sacred ministry has soldiers in its ranks who are false to their *oath*, and yet that ministry is sacred ; religion has those who profess it but are not good, and yet it is religion which can save."


## XXIII.

### The Invisible Witnesses.

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2 KINGS VI. 16, 17.

"And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray Thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."

 LISHA the Prophet was in the little town of Dothan, which lies on a hill overlooking the great road between Syria and Egypt. In the watches of the night the town was beset by the soldiery of the King of Syria, sent to seize the Prophet whose prescience had warned the King of Israel, not once nor twice, of the stratagems of his enemy, and enabled him to foil them. Such a helper was more to the King of Israel than ten thousand fighting men: of such an ally the Syrian must rob him. Here, then, at the gates, waited a detachment of the Syrian army, ready at break of day to force their way in and carry off the Prophet.

But that morning the servant of the man of God had risen early: something, it seems, had roused him before his hour; perhaps some noise made by the beleaguering soldiery, perhaps one of those obscure presentiments which have been known to make men restless when danger is brewing, though they know it not; he looks out from the walls and sees



encamped, on some knoll or vantage ground beyond the city gates, an overwhelming force—horse, and foot, and chariots—waiting to swoop down on their prey. And, seeing it, he despairs of rescue: “Alas! my master, how shall we do?”

Then came the answer I have read to you, “Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.” A very different mood was this of Elisha from that of his startled follower. Yet, I think, we seldom, on first reading the story, do justice to the astonishing intrepidity of faith which the answer expresses. We assume that Elisha so replied because he himself already saw between him and the foe that impassable girdle of fire, the chariots and horsemen of the Almighty. But the story only says that these were seen by his follower: it does not say Elisha saw that vision: he did not need to see it: he had lived ever with the sense of God’s unseen hosts at hand to protect him, since the day when the chariot of fire had taken his master from his side: he believed, that walk where he would, so it was in Jehovah’s service,

“There were witnesses, cohorts, about him, to left and to right,  
Angels, powers, the unuttered, unseen, the alive, the aware.”

It was his follower, the young in faith, not he, who needed the assurance of this open vision of “the angel of God that encampeth round about them that fear Him and delivereth them.” The vision was given to him because he needed it to make him trust God. There was no further use made of the fiery host (I would ask you to note this); there follows no battle of angels against men: quietly, silently, without a blow struck, the hand of Jehovah brings

His Prophet safe through the peril and delivers his foes into his power.

So, then, the fiery host, though it is the feature of the tale which most fills our imagination, must not draw our attention away from the true elements of the event. These are, that a man, daunted by the show of superior force in the enemies of his faith, and thinking that he stands alone and helpless, is made to see, in a way he could understand, that he is not alone, nor helpless, nor are the odds against him, but rather are on his side—if only his eyes are opened to see it.

This makes the story a helpful tale to us, instead of a mere romance. For we, too, are liable to think ourselves overmatched by evil or the evil: and we expect no vision of angel warriors, fiery shapes, burning chariot wheels: yet our eyes, too, may be opened, not as the Israelite's were, but in ways *we* can understand, to see that we, too, are not alone, are not overmatched, but that they that are with us are more than they that are against us.

For it is, I take it, a common experience for men and women who are trying to lead the higher life, to fancy themselves alone, or at least lonely, in their aims and practice: that they are in a world of foes, with few or none to hope their hopes and believe in their beliefs. No doubt, they say, it is an age of social union and co-operation: for industrial production, for education, for amusement, men are daily more and more co-operative: there are associations without number for useful and even the highest ends—societies for sending missions into English city streets or to the ends of the earth: for teaching, nursing, feeding the poor and helpless: for restraining wicked and cruel abuses. But amid all this co-operation where is the fellowship of heart

with heart—the fellowship of the Spirit which St. Paul speaks of and seems to know so well? Where is the old close bond between brother and brother, the wonder of the world who “beheld how these Christians loved one another”? Where the affection of comrades in faith, which made possible those warm outpourings in the greetings and farewells of St. Paul’s letters to the Churches? Where is even that brotherly unitedness and unselfishness which was the ideal, if we may not say the practice, of a chivalrous past, and which here and there did really bind together in some knightly or monastic order a band of high-souled men, sworn to a common devotion and to mutual faithfulness even unto death? Nowhere, they say: not in our life, not in our time: we are fallen on a hard and divided generation, a generation which talks much of sympathy and forms many societies, but in which, behind the philanthropic and religious talk which is the decent ornament of life, the world-old pursuit of private wealth, party triumphs, personal fame, is steadily carried on as the one true serious work of existence. We are alone, or all but alone, they say, in a world made up of pronounced enemies or useless neutrals. They that are against us are more, a thousandfold more, than they that are with us.

That is what many earnest people say, and still more feel, though they do not say it.

But is it true? Can it be true? For one thing, if the good are so few, how comes it the world is not wickeder than it is: if the salt of the earth be so little, how has the mass not more utterly lost its savour? Surely there must be a mistake, there must be an illusion: the odds cannot be as we reckon them: there must be more with than against us,—if only we could see them.

Why can we not see them? One reason is not hard to name. Between the Israelite's eyes and the ghostly armies there hung a blinding curtain, the blindness of human flesh which cannot without a revelation look on spirit. But between us and our fellow-mortals there is drawn a triple veil, which it needs almost a revelation to pierce. They are there in open view : their persons, their faces, their dress, their habits of life—all these we see. Themselves we do not see. Their looks do not truly declare them : their words do not really utter them : their actions only half interpret them. But besides all this a hundred circumstances of age, station, temperament, education raise, each of them, some barrier between mind and mind. This man has not been trained in the same studies as ourselves : he has reasoned out the same moral problems in a different language from our own : we do not understand him or he us : neither knows that subtle touch of language which will strike the spark on the other's heart. This man is older, or he is younger than ourselves : and, because the fashion of the world changes, we have not learnt the things he knows, and what we know is knowledge too new or too old for him. Another has not our own temperament ; is reticent, and hard to stir ; or he is stirred where we are unmoved, is cold where we are set on fire :

"He cannot summon when he will  
The fire that in the heart resides."

Much less can he summon it when we will. A reserve is on him. What can he do? Love and be silent.

So men live unknown to one another. What wonder, then, if the servants of God do not recognize one another, and often some warrior of Christ walks in fancied solitari-

ness while, unseen, unsuspected, a brother-in-arms walks beside him, and guards his side unknown and unknowing. The scoffer who said he "had never seen a Christian" may well have spoken truly, since even Christians may fail to see one another.

I am not saying, however, that this reserve, this hiding of ourselves from fellow-Christians is right and as it should be. It is often wrong, often due to a faulty strain in the character—some pride which shrinks from the equality even of fellowship in faith, some half-heartedness which fears self-committal. But though the reserve be never so much a fault, it is none the less a fact. And if it is a fact, then the fancied isolation of the Christian is an illusion. He is not alone: the odds are not against him as he thinks: they seem so only because his eyes are not opened and he cannot see the truth.

And surely there come times when a man's eyes are opened, and he does see that they that are with him are more than they that are against him. Perhaps a burst of generosity or sympathy in some common nature where he least expected it, shows him, in a flash of insight, how far and how deep in common life the Gospel precept of love has struck its roots. Perhaps his is the Psalmist's experience, and his despairing broodings over the success of evil and evil men are contradicted by the sight of some signal overthrow: "I myself have seen the ungodly in great power; and flourishing like a green bay tree. I went by, and lo! he was gone: I sought him, but his place could no where be found": and he goes by the place where the lightning has fallen murmuring, not in pride but in awe, "Doubtless there is a God that judgeth the earth." Or, again, he reads of something nobly said or bravely done in



a distant age or country by some good soldier of the same faith: and it comes to him as a distant trumpet-call of friends, telling him how far spreads the battle-line of the Truth, with what a breadth and volume God's war is moving forward.

Or yet once more it may happen, as in this tale of Elisha, that he learns from some older believer to see a vision of the might of the spiritual world hid from himself: for though they say that youth is the time of hopes, yet often it is the privilege of age to be hopeful where youth despairs, and, having outlived its fears, to reach that "prophetic strain" of old experience which sees all things working together for good to them that love God.

On this feature in the story—that it is the younger man's eyes which are opened by the prayer and faith of the elder—we who are gathered here may dwell for a moment more.

That sense of being left alone in our attempt at well-doing, of which I have spoken, does not always come from a disappointing experience of life. Quite the contrary: it may come from want of experience; may be felt by those who know too little of the world as by those who know too much; by the boy as surely as by the man. To do one's duty, when duty means thinking and speaking and acting contrary to the wishes of the world, that is of our fellows, always brings isolation, always tends to cause loneliness, alike for man or for boy. And there is this serious difference that, for the most part, it is less easy for the boy than for the man to seclude himself from the presence and contact of those whom his right doing may make unkind. "A man's foes," said Christ, "shall be they of his own household": that fact is true for all ages and conditions, and it may, and sometimes does, press with peculiar



severity in early years, when our life is more closed in to "those of our own household." Then in that narrower circle, that bounded horizon that has room in it only, as it were, for ourselves and those who are against us, whether as tempters or as persecutors, the odds against us seem greater than they are. There is an illusion : we judge from the near field of vision, which is but a fragment : and so we judge amiss that they that are against us are more than they that are with us.

What shall relieve this disheartenment and give courage and hope to whoever feels it ? Surely, as of old at Dothan, it must be the opening of his eyes (as faith and prayer can open them) to see beyond his fragment of the world, his little portion of the human battle-field, and catch a glimpse of God's larger world in which the balance is reversed, that wider battle-field on which are displayed the true forces which will decide the issue of the war. He is not so alone. His elders in faith or duty would show him, if only their experience could open his eyes, that his isolation is a seeming and a passing one. They would say that doubtless within touch of him stand many sound and true hearts who, if they can do little to help, yet bear him a brotherly respect and sympathy, which is not worthless because it is nothing more. But, be that as it may, at least there stand on his side all the good, all the wise, all the brave, all the high-souled and generous-hearted who live now and have lived in the past : he has entered into a new comradeship, a mighty brotherhood of those with whom has been and is and shall be the victory ; of those whom he would most desire to have love him and approve him ; among whom he would choose to live, or, if so it should chance, to die.

Is it a shadowy comfort this ? Is it a remote and unsub-

stantial army of God which such thoughts summon to our side? Ah! well: those chariots and horses of fire were they not in a like sense shadows? Do we hear that they raised one battle-cry or struck one stroke? Not so. And yet safe in the comfort of their presence, safe because that visionary presence was the token of the yet more invisible hand of the Almighty, the prophet and his followers walked through the ranks of their enemies unhurt. But I will not argue it in figures. Ask whoever has done well and suffered for it, if it was cold comfort to know that he had earned the "Well done" of those near him whom he loves and honours; if it was a little thing that he had become of the company of all those, near him and far off, who are most worthy of honour and of love. Ask him: and he will say with that martyr of Greek fable when, left forlorn of human sympathy in a duty of perilous faithfulness, she chooses between the near and the far off, the living and the departed, "More are the years in which I must please those elsewhere than those here": and he will cast in his lot unshrinkingly with those who now and for ever have the victory that overcomes the world.

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## XXIV.

### The Might-have-been.

2 SAMUEL XVIII. 33.

"And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said. O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom. Would God I had died for thee. O Absalom, my son, my son."



O David mourned for Absalom, and somehow none of us wish to find fault with him.

Is that because it happened so very long ago and matters nothing to ourselves? For men found fault with David at the time: at least Joab did, and very sensibly too, for the people were as dejected as if they were a beaten army stealing home after battle, and yet this Absalom for whom the king made such a lamentation was one (says Joab) who, had he won, would now have been massacring the king's sons and daughters and wives and loyal servants. And what a life, too, he had led all along! First he had murdered his own brother under the pledge of hospitality (no doubt in vengeance for a bitter wrong); he had turned traitor to his own father, and that by advantage of that father's forgiveness. Now he was dead, and the world well rid of him, and honest folk might have their own again and sleep in peace. What folly to bemoan such a one; what weak, and, in a king, what culpable indulgence in the luxury of idle grief! But somehow we to-day forgive

David for it, or, if we think Joab's remonstrance sensible, we forgive at any rate that first outburst in the chamber over the gate. Yet what was Absalom to deserve it? For in truth there is only one good thing <sup>we</sup> can discover to say of Absalom: and that one good thing <sup>we</sup> learn from David's outburst. It is that once he had had David's love, and such a love as could cry, "Would God I had died for thee."

It is the only thing I can find to the credit of this profligate youth, that once he had his father's love. But it is something to his credit. For it is likely that David's love was not given for nothing: there must have been something in this man, of whom history records nothing but black crimes, something which was love-worthy though history has not recorded it. It is easy to say that love is blind, and that a parent will believe no ill of a child. But I fancy that this love-blindness is very often love-insight: it means that the parent has seen a worth, a beauty, a nobleness where others have been unable to see it, because that worth and nobleness, before they could express themselves in act, have been stifled and done to death by the victory of base passions or some unhappy perversion. The parent was not wrong: the worth was there, the love was called for: only, alas! a cloud of evil has swept up, and blotted out the fair sight just caught by the affectionate eyes, and now no man but the parent will ever know how goodly a human life was marred before it could be made. The parent had found out, and only he, what good things lay before that boy of his, what possibilities of noble life until——. O we must not blame him, or call him merely fond and foolish and blind, because the boy whom he keeps seeing before him is not the stained, disgraced, broken, blighted, loveless profligate whom the world sees, but the boy with the keen eyes and the

bright wit and the warm heart, clothed in the beauty of a noble promise for the manhood to be : the manhood to be, which has never been. Ah ! yes, here is the secret of that outburst in the chamber over the gate. Besides the Absalom who was, there is the Absalom who might have been : this is the dead son whom David is lamenting, this is the son *he* knew, the son *he* cannot forget, whose image is not blotted out by the shamed figure of the murderer, rebel, traitor, which is the only Absalom visible to all the rest. In the shades of the lone chamber over the gate the old man draws to his breast the semblance of a winsome, beautiful, gallant, high-hearted boy, and lo ! it is a phantom which he cannot enfold, a shadow of a dead thing that can never be any more : and in the anguish of that irremediable loss the old heart breaks in tears.

King David has been for Jew and for Christian a type of the Christ. This in spite of all his sins. We sometimes perhaps have wondered at his position in religious thought ; for, we say, he can hardly be called a good man. Well, perhaps hardly a good man ; but at any rate a man he was, very much a man, a man in the humanities of free, vehement, generous passion, in loves and hates, in courage, constancy, chivalry, in truth-speaking, and in heart-speaking. It may well have been his great and full humanity which has singled him out to be a prophetic image of that hope of earth Who called Himself the Son of Man.

For this once we will make him a type of something else : he shall be an image not of God the Son, but of God the Father : his fatherly love shall be symbol to us of the love of a Father Who is in Heaven. May it not be that even the great Father loves and mourns a son as David did, yes, and for cause the same ?



~~Consider it.~~ Such an one is dead, gone (as we say) to his last account: it is a bad record which closes, a life vicious, reckless, false: the world sighs with relief to be well rid of him: the Joabs have struck their spears into him as he hung in calamity's grip, and the multitude have cast each man his opprobrious stone to build up the monument of infamy over that disastrous life. But meanwhile the news of that shameful ending has been borne to the towers of Heaven. Is it relief, is it exultation, is it opprobrium that greets it there? I think it not. Rather I think it is a Father, a Divine Father, mourning in His high place with a sorrow larger than the sorrow of man, over "his son, his son." True, He knows (for is He not divine?), He knows better even than Joab and the multitude, how ill a son this child has been; He knows his follies, perversities, rebellions, treacheries, violences—who so well as He? But it is something else over which that infinite compassion, that unconquerable love bends in sorrow. That Father is mourning not the fool, the rebel, the profligate, but the son whom He knew before these evil days: the child of His desires, His hopes; the man who might have been, who was not, and now can never be. In that chamber over the gate of Heaven there sits a Presence which we image often to ourselves as the just, unyielding Judge, impassively dealing out man's due. But if there be joy among the angels over one sinner that repenteth, shall there not be sorrow among them for one sinner lost to repentance: and shall not the Lord of the Angels sorrow the most over the child whom He brought into the world, whom He made a living soul, and on its birthday looked on it in love, and behold! then and there and thus at least, and as its Father had made it to be, behold, it was very good?



Would Absalom, if he could have foreseen David's passion of grief over his ruin, would Absalom have been touched at heart, and chosen to have the father's love rather than his own ruin? One cannot know. And however that may be, one of us mortal children of the Father in Heaven may find a power upon our wills in the imagination of that parental love which can so sorrow at our fall. If God so cherishes my soul, if He can so delight in the work of His own hands, and believe it so capable of good, mourn so over its failure of good, shall I not care for it myself, believe in it myself, covet to become that which I might be, was made to be? Ah! surely. And while there is time, while the boy whose impulses and bent can still be fashioned aright has not yet passed into the set mould, hard to alter, of the man, I will let myself be shaped by the Father's love: I will away with this coldness of my heart, while it is coldness only, not a deadness of the heart: I will quiet and subdue in me the wayward spirit, while it is but wayward and not yet a traitor: I will stifle down the self-seeking before it take fire in rebellion, before the Father's heart which now yearns to me in love is left to melt in a sorrow too late to save.

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## The Burning of the Roll.

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JEREMIAH XXXVI. 32.

"Then took Jeremiah another roll, and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah; who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire: and there were added besides unto them many like words."



WHEN the king of Israel dealt thus with the prophet's roll the feeling of some of those who looked on was one of shock at the impiety of the act. "Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king nor any of his servants that heard all these words." The narrator is overpowered with a sense of the outrage that had passed, and the callousness of the man who had committed it. But if we, on our part, are to find the instructiveness of Jehoiakim's story we must not merely take for granted the impiety; we must consider his circumstances, and that will lead us to judge him more sympathetically, and therefore more truly, and therefore more usefully for ourselves.

So let me point out to those who do not accurately know the history of that time what the situation was of this Jewish king. His little kingdom lay on the road between two strong empires to the North and the South, Assyria and Egypt. To fight one another the armies of these two must march through this king's territory. Now it is hard enough

in our own day for a little state to maintain its independence between powerful neighbours on the right hand and the left : we see that in Europe and in Asia too. It was harder still, in days when conquerors recognized no moral checks, for Palestine to remain free. Yet to be free was, as most men thought, the moral duty of God's chosen people : why else had Hezekiah shown so stout a face against Sennacherib ? It was the duty then of a king of Judah to stand for his nation's independence. So, no doubt, reasoned Jehoiakim ; and though his father, Josiah, had thought it right to cast in his lot with Assyria, and like a faithful vassal had died in battle against the Egyptians in order to hold the passes for his liege lord of Assyria ; and though he himself, when the beaten armies of Egypt had flowed back from the Assyrian border, and when the victorious Nebuchadnezzar, following in their pursuit, had overrun Palestine, had sworn an oath of obedience and fealty to the northern conqueror : yet now, when there seemed an opportunity, because the Assyrian armies were busy elsewhere, Jehoiakim did not scruple to break his word and revolt. It is ill to break one's word, but Jehoiakim would have his excuses. Was it not just to pay back force with fraud ? Could an oath be binding which was an oath of servitude for God's people ? And he would say nothing to himself about the fact (though it counted, like enough, for more than all) that he wanted to be quit of the tribute, because he could then spend the money on his banquets and his buildings, the wide house and large chambers, ceiled with cedar and painted with vermillion. Yet there lay the clue to his conduct. The scene in the winterhouse, at the fireside of the king, means just this. For long past a prophet, who knew the mind of God, had been warning king and nation that the Assyrian ruler was

the instrument of God's will ; that it lay in the design of Providence that Judah should become his vassal, and that only by submission and fidelity in submission could a king of Judah do the pleasure of God : this way only could be found the salvation of the people. It sounded an unpatriotic message : it was most unacceptable to a proud, luxurious, self-willed prince, who would be shorn of some of his revenues, and some of his prestige abroad and power at home ; but it was God's will ; and nothing but harm could come from trying to resist that great order of things ordained for earth by earth's Maker. And on this winter afternoon the prophet's message is for the last time brought to the king in the roll which Baruch wrote at the mouth of Jeremiah. Two or three columns of the writing the clerk is allowed to read ; but that is too much for the king : he plucks the roll from the reader's hand, seizes a knife, cuts the parchment into pieces, and tosses the shreds into the brazier of burning charcoal. There one sees the sacred scroll lying on the slow coals, wilting, curling, twisting, writhing, flaming up under the king's sullen, glowering eyes, then dying down into a dull black ash. All gone ! All those brave words of menace and reproach, all those eloquent periods, all those ' Thus saith the Lord's—there they go, he muses, there they go into nothingness : thus am I done with the teasing, conceited, factious, importunate preacher : so much for all his treasons and sedition-mongerings : so much for the ' word of the Lord.'

Yes, like some poor, foolish rustic in old times of witchcraft who would burn an effigy of his enemy, and fancy as the flame consumed the puppet image so would destruction consume the living foe—like such an one, I think, Jehoiakim fancied that when he burned to nothing the prophet's roll of

parchment, he was doing to nought the living word of the Lord Who lives for ever. But what follows? "Then took Jeremiah another roll, and gave it to Baruch the scribe; . . . who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim the king of Judah had burned in the fire: and there were added besides unto them many like words." Jehoiakim did not by burning the words of God's counsel destroy that counsel itself, he only made it fall with heavier weight. God's order went forward on its way, and he who would not bow to it was broken underneath it. For the doom fell surely, a doom of disaster and ignominy, perhaps in its features even such an end as the prophet forecast, "A dead body cast out in the day to the heat, in the night to the frost," "buried with the burial of an ass; drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem."

Where is the instruction of the tale? In the common matters of life most of us know the man or woman who seems to think that if facts are disagreeable, you have only to lose your temper over them, and you will do away with the disagreeable facts. In the largest of all life's concerns the like attitude is sometimes indulged in. Here lies our personal life and fortune, our "single state of man," as a poet called it, in the midst of God's vast scheme of human things, acted on by this scheme, dependent on it, as the little state of Judah lay amidst the scheme of earthly empires. A mighty order of fact and influence surrounds the individual man, and upon whether he bears himself truly or mistakenly towards this order depends whether his fate is good or bad. And a counsel of God comes to him, directing him how he should shape his conduct towards the scheme of things. It does not come to him in a prophet's



roll, which he can read or else burn ; but it does come in some mode which he can either honour with a welcome or can lose his temper with and treat with scorn, under the idea that by this means he can be quit of obeying it.

Let me try to show how by an example or two. Very early in life the case can happen. When we are young boys and girls, and still under discipline, what is, for us then, the order of God which we must yield to ? Chiefly the will of the parents. The rule of parents may not be a perfect system, yet, roughly, it represents to the child the larger and truer order outside the individual will, to which that will must conform : the parent's word is the prophet's message to the child. It is needless to say that the parent's will sometimes crosses the son's or daughter's, it is disagreeable, it seems an unnecessary or an unwise restraint. What to do in that case ? Well, not as Jehoiakim, king of Judah. Do not lose your temper, and go away to your room exclaiming that it is a shame to keep a son down in that way, or nonsense to restrict a daughter that other way. It is quite easy, even for the young, to say cutting things about the narrowness and want of wisdom of their elders, and to show their feeling in sullen or impatient moods ; what is not easy, what is impossible, is to alter the fact that obedience is for the young the prophet's counsel from God, and the young life can only prosper by it. You may perhaps come to no visible disaster as boy or girl ; but your future life, by its follies, blindness, weakness, and false starts will take revenge on the petulance of the child. All the words are written again, and there are added besides many like words.

Again, on a later day of your life, God's counsel, the word which interprets to you His order, presents itself to you in a riper mode. It is the mode of what I will call the world's



moral and social experience : I mean that wisdom of men, which because it is man's is not therefore uninspired, which embodies itself in the laws of marriage and of property, in the unwritten rules of social intercourse, or the code of honour binding in a profession, or (one may also add) the code of religious observance imposed by a Church. Here surely is opportunity for a clash between the impulse of the individual and the law of his society. The clash comes, and the result is at times a revolt with passion. The young man finds some strong craving checked by one of these old ordinances. He flames up and rails at the ignorant convention which obstructs, " Cannot I judge for myself what is wise and lawful in conscience better than a past generation, which does not know the new ideas, and cannot comprehend the young men and women of to-day ? Are my vigorous impulses to be strangled by antiquated prejudices, by a fossil etiquette, by the social oppression of the dull and the timid ? "

That is the reasoning. And presently some startling breach with religion, some defiant marriage out of rule, some outrage on the moral reserves which govern art or literature is justified in the eyes of the perpetrator by a burst of passion against the wickedness of social tyrannies.

Ah ! well. A man may scorn and scout and ridicule the wisdom of the past : he may rail at it eloquently, he may dissect it with a satire as cutting as Jehoiakim's penknife. But how if that wisdom of the past be the counsel of God, the interpreter of God's order for human life ? Why, then passion and ridicule may supply the man with the force to break the law : they cannot supply the force which will cancel the consequences to the man who breaks it. " All the words of the roll are written again."

Last, God lets you know—by what voice it matters not, but somehow—that a particular line of life is God's order for you. But you had other views, more consonant with your self-esteem: you want a path that leads to more money, influence, intellectual stimulus, social opportunity, more leisure or enjoyment: you want to ally your fortunes with quite a different interest or party: God calls you to obey the northern power, you want to ally yourself with Egypt. *God's way*, beside *your way*, looks dull, it leads in paths of subordination and restraint; it closes the ambitious vistas. What then? Will you reject His message? And, in order to do so with more comfort of conscience, will you (as we have seen men do) try to cancel God's counsel by behaving scornfully, despitefully, bitterly towards the good cause you have betrayed, by ridiculing its agents and its results, by deriding holy things which remind you of a duty refused, by echoing some unbeliever's sarcasm on a faith which you desert. Will you? If you do, that will *not* cancel the counsel of God. There may be no disaster, such as men reckon; no poetical justice for the revolt; and yet, to eyes that can see, there will be the spectacle of energies condemned to barrenness, of a growing perversity and disorder in the workings of character, a secret bitterness where peace might have been: and these will seem an issue tragic enough for the man who gives to the knife and the fire what after all was the counsel of God for him. "All the words of the book were written again, and there were added besides unto them many like words."

## XXVI.

### A Sacramental Moment.

2 KINGS XIII. 18.

"And he said, Take the arrows. And he took them. And he said unto the king of Israel, Smite upon the ground. And he smote thrice, and stayed."

"**W**HY," one asks, "is the prophet wroth? Why should Joash know that three arrows were not enough, that five or six was the number necessary?" Something wants explaining here.

Not that the record lacks vividness. The new champion of Israel bends over the dying prophet with whom will die a tradition. *He* was passing away who had felt the skirts of the whirlwind flame which bore hence Elijah; he round whose self the horses and chariots of fire had been seen embattled. The grand tradition of a God encompassing His own would perish with this man, and perish in Israel's dark hour, when an untried prince sat on a doubtful throne, under the shadow of a foreign tyranny. Ah! we understand that passionate cry, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof." And the answer, too. "Take bow and arrows. . . . Put thy hand upon the bow." We guess the prophet's drift when the pale, shrunk, nerveless fingers of age settle tremulously on the firm warrior hands where the blood courses warm and the sinews swell. "The arrow of the Lord's deliverance." "I am the weak,

and thou, young prince, the strong: yet through such as I am passes the might that conquers." "Take the arrows." And the king takes, shoots three shafts—and stays.

Why does the old man sink back upon his pillows disappointed and wroth? Why must the victory of Joash be now only a half victory? What virtue lay in the discharge of five arrows, which was denied to the discharge of three?

If you ever asked that question in your childhood, you were most likely answered, "It showed Joash had not faith." The answer only needs to be more precise. For, as I understand it, Elisha was calling Joash to what we should call a sacramental act. He appoints him in this archery an outward sign, and indicates that with it there will go a divine gift, the grace of victory over enemies. There was surely good occasion for a sacramental pledge: a nation's crisis, a young ruler's passion of grief, the shadow of a dread venture upon him, the presence by him of that sainted mortal who had once looked through the fiery gate between this world and the unseen, and now stood with his own foot on that awful threshold—these things made a moment for faith and grace by faith. And Elisha sees in the prince a mood of exaltation. "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof" meant so much: he is in some measure "in the Spirit": now, if ever, he can be taught to see what is the strength that conquers upon earth: this, if any, will be his hour of vision: once again, as at Dothan, God, at a prophet's prayer, will open a young man's eyes to see the embattled angels who stand between God's own and the foemen: here is the hinge of a career: now can a faith be sealed. Therefore out of his silence of half a lifetime the saint of ninety years rouses himself again, once ere death, to pour his own long-pent enthusiasm into the veins of the

strong young champion. "Would you rescue Israel? Then be as I am, see what I see, believe in my belief. Let the Spirit-life which kindled once from those flaming chariot wheels upon this grey seer, a youth then as thou, let that life catch and kindle upon thee. Where is the Lord God of Elijah? Where but at thy side to-day? Here is the pledge of His grace upon thee. Here be the arrows of the Lord's deliverance. In this sign shalt thou conquer. Take the arrows—and smite!"

Alas! the young man rises not to the old man's faith: the flame kindles not on him. He should have snatched the quiver with hands of fire, and sprung arrow after arrow from the string till the quiver lay empty at his side. Instead he makes languid, perfunctory response to the impassioned appeal: shoots thrice (so much respect demanded), and holds his hand. Perhaps he was saying to himself, "What is the use of this? Is not this enthusiasm overdone, this faith a little out of fashion? The arrow of deliverance from Syria! That will be forged by the statecraft of my councillors, the strategy of my marshals, not by this old man's rapture, I am making myself a little absurd in yielding so far." Anyhow he will not let his heart make the spring, and surrender to the divine enchantment. The charm is countercharmed by coldness, the holy spell breaks, the inspiration exhales upon the air, the cup of that wine of strength is spilt on earth, a sacrament has been made null.

What does all this mean for us? Perhaps this will do for a meaning.

Moralists often insist on the value of life's daily insignificant things, its common indistinguishable moments. They are not wrong: but let us not forget that there are great moments, outvaluing in their effect on the drift of a man's



character the influence of a million lesser ones. I mean the moments when a faith or a decision passes before you, claiming your choice: there is divine enchantment in the air, an inspiration ready to fall, a mystic force hovers beside you waiting to mix with your own, and some word spoken, or look cast, or act done will set free the force to impel you. These are sacramental moments, moments of the sacrament of Divine Impulse. You must give yourself to the sacrament, let it have its way with you, and fear not; or it is null, and your hour has passed you.

What does all this mean for us?

I stand before a company strange to me, though gathered in a place known to me so very well, so very deeply. But of yourselves what do I know at all except this, that each of you has before him as his lot the history of a soul. What that history shall be, concerns your portion in the world to come, your peace in this. What will give it its character? I dare predict that nothing will determine it so much as what I would call life's sacramental moments. For these will come to you.

Perhaps you are at point to choose your career. You hear someone picturing an honourable profession—its opportunities of usefulness, its hopes, toils, rewards, consolations: your heart answers, "Here is the life for me!" your eyes are opened, and you see your true path: almost you have thrown yourself into it:—but no, you will wait a little, you hold your tongue, and ask no questions to commit yourself: the spell dies off the heart: the moment passes.

Or in your own family, by death or other circumstance, there emerges an opening for action on your part—help of a parent, a new relation of protector or adviser to a sister, a sacrifice of schemes of your own that you may better the



prospects of younger brothers. Love and unselfishness swell up in your heart, you are just on the brink of an expression of yourself, of a promise : a moment, and a word will have sealed you for a career of duty and piety, blessing and blessed :——but—the word is kept back : “ I will not say it to-night,” you think : then next morning, cooler, soberer, juster views about duty arrive : you will do the sensible thing, you say : and the sensible thing is seldom the heroic : so the glory of unselfishness is lost.

Or there falls on your ear, as you listen under the arches of some noble Church, the accents of a famed preacher's voice, pleading with men to remember their high calling, to venture to be saints. It is a revelation to you of yourself : your heart bounds in response : you are lifted beyond yourself : you know, for a moment, that you too may attain holiness. Then you come back from the Church door to the fireside, the talk, the domestic mementoes of the life you actually lead, and presently you are content to be no saint, but just as other people are.

Or last, some older man (how like is this to our tale), some older man, full of good works, but now at his vigour's fading point, seeks to lay on your younger strength the burden of his own unaccomplished hopes, bids you see a glory where he has seen it, believe with his belief. You half commit yourself——but——you are afraid of extravagance, you shrink under the breath of his keen spirit, the hand but half answers to the hand-grasp, eye will not quite meet eye, the voice stammers in the watchword which should have been clear as a battle-cry : you are not carried away by him. Alas ! there is the pity of it, you are not carried anywhere : the stream of destiny which would have borne you to a goal has passed you by and left you in the shallows. You have

shot at the prophet's bidding but thrice, and you forfeit conquest. There was a sacrament at your hand: you falter and it is null.

Do not answer, "Yes, but if the timid lose a chance, so, too, the rash may blunder." Do not quote old maxims that say, "Be wary and mistrustful, the sinews of the soul are these." That is what I deny. Not the soul's *sinews*. In these days of ours when a wider but often less vital knowledge is cooling down adventure and disenchanting the fairy horizons of boyhood, what men are wanting is not more knowledge, criticism, caution: it is the power of will. We lack not direction more, but impulsion; not the finger which shall point out the paths which are false, but the hand which shall push us forward in the true one. Whence is this to come? A Christian will answer, in fewest words, "'I believe in the Holy Ghost.' There is a Spirit Whose Name is not only of Counsel, but also of Strength; and though His might is like the wind, and bloweth where it listeth, and you cannot trace its coming or its going, yet I believe that in such moments of an unprepared for sacrament as I have described these ardours of the heart are the sway of that trackless wind of God upon the heart of a man."

Standing here to-day within the walls\* where I once sat in the place of any of you: standing here, and under the only not living eyes of one who reared these walls, and whose sculptured marble yonder will seem, while men remember him, to cast a pure spell on the air of this house of Christ, I think myself to be pleading a belief to which the stone shall cry out of the wall for witness, and the beam out of the timber answer it. He whom we boys of that time

\* Uppingham School Chapel.

saw build this Chapel thirty years ago was certainly one of those who take the bow not to smite thrice and stay. What he set his hand to, that he followed up, that he carried through. What he came to believe, that he believed with a whole heart and unshakeably. What cause he gave his love to, that he loved to the end, and time could not abate the dauntless tones of his championship. This is known to all. But it is not of his tenacity, his conviction, his enthusiasm I would speak, but of another thing, better seen perhaps by friends. For it seemed to us that, more than is given to many men, he was open to those monitions which come from beyond the limits of our world of sense. The thought was often with him of an inspiration which even in life's lesser occasions is a power of the Lord present to help; he was not shamed to avow it. And surely there were times when he became himself a witness to the truth of his own avowal, times when he seemed as one of those to whom the wall that sunders men and spiritual realities

"Becomes as crystal, and he sees them through it.

And hears the voices talk behind the wall":

times when the strength of a will, strong beyond the measure of other men, could be known for that of the Spirit of ghostly strength, because that breath had touched him, and we, who knew not whence or whither, yet heard the sound of it in a man's rapt utterance, and saw the fire of it in a man's kindled eye.

Let me make it my word to you, my younger brethren at my one-time school, that our life has among its foundation stones the example of one who was true to his life's great moments, because he feared not that the Spirit of Counsel and Strength should bear him whither It would.

## XXVII.

### How Love Covers Sins.

I ST. PETER IV. 7, 8.

"But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins."



IT seems almost to trifle to notice the misinterpretations which have been current of the saying that charity covers the multitude of sins. At least, it would be to insult the knowledge of an audience to stop to brush away the notion, which yet people have held, that the sins in question are those of the man who shows charity, and that God will pardon them for the sake of his grace of charity. Less ignorant, however, and less remote from the truth, is the interpretation which finds in the phrase a precept of tolerance, of lenient judgment, of genial blindness to the wrong-doings of other men—an interpretation which has made of it a sordid proverb in plea of cowardly connivance. But how could anyone think this? When an Apostle is warning his Church that "the end of all things is at hand," that the Lord delays no more, but comes with the winnowing fan of judgment in his hand to discern between good and bad, to unmask hypocrisies, to unveil the secrets of the heart, would Peter's awful trumpet-note of warning end in the mild and inconsequent strain of an exhortation to tolerance? "The God of Judgment comes:

therefore—let us not be hard upon people's faults." Impossible! Here is no maxim of indulgence. It is a call to arms. From his watch-tower the Apostle has seen the brightness of the Advent kindle on the horizon's edge: he foresees the outstreaming of that intolerable light of truth and purity which will kindle every holiness on earth and blacken every shadow; he feels, as it were, from far a pulse of that furnace breath of consuming fire which will alight scorchingly on the selfishness and the vice of men—and to those below he cries out his alarm, "Awake; be steady; be watchful; be strong in prayer against the great hour. Before all, let the love ye bear one another (for so the words are) be intense, be strained to the uttermost, because (he adds) such love will cover a multitude of sins, will hide them from God's sight, will shrink and dwindle the surface of that broad field of man's iniquity on which the fire of His justice would else come down."

But now, how can Christian love do this? I think in a double way—by Forgiveness, and by Prevention.

By Forgiveness. "Blessed is he," said the Psalmist, "whose unrighteousness is forgiven, and whose sin is covered." He meant "covered by God," that is, treated as if it were not: as if God should put His hand over a sin and refuse to see it. Something like this, I believe, human love can do, when it forgives a brother's sin. True, it does not follow that because man forgives a sin, therefore God forgives it. If the sinner does not repent, his brother whom he wronged cannot put away his sin. No. Nor, if he does not repent, can God Himself put away His sin. Yet there is a sense, real though mystical, in which man's forgiveness can cover sins. "Father, forgive them," prayed Jesus, to teach us that intercession can win pardon. And



is not the forgiveness of a sinning brother the purest of all acts of intercession, the very utmost energy of prayer for a brother's soul? If prayer for others win God's mercy, how much more can forgiveness win it, and the human hand draw the covering hand of God between the offence and His righteous eyes.

But there is another sense, not mystical but practical, in which Love the Forgiver does away sins. I will not speak of those *imaginary* offences of our fellows, which, if unreal themselves, cause in us a resentment which is not unreal. Of course, the forgiving temper destroys these phantom offences. Yet these phantoms, what a world of offences they are; how they make, for many people, the unwholesome climate of their life, the ungracious scenery of half their actions. But I will speak of real wrongs—unkindnesses and affronts, rivalries or retaliations or injustices, the spites or slights or indignities, grudgings and envyings and misjudgings, and all the long list of injurious things with which man can hurt his fellow-man. Love can do more than forgive these; it can do away with them. For these sins require, mostly, a congenial climate, an air in which no love is: they thrive by collision, they are gendered, like an electric condition, by friction; they are sparks which start where iron meets iron; scorn answers scorn, ambition challenges ambition, self-assertion provokes selfishness; misunderstanding blossoms into dislike, dislike ripens into hate, because the atmosphere is hot with passion; random censures and recriminations, fickle irritations, which would die upon the air we charge with them, strike off flinty surfaces and reverberate in sharper tones. Now it takes the very life out of offences of this character to be brought into contact with the pure, clear temper of forgiveness, and strike



on its soft, invulnerable, unrepulsive bosom. Spite and mockery lose heart because their challenge is not taken; the voice of self-assertion seems to lose its ring, and is ashamed of declaiming into a void; the life dies out of quarrelsomeness at the want of reciprocity. And then do we not know how some sudden revelation of Christian love, by action or speech, in another; or some silent discovered instance of disinterestedness, or generous, simple heart-word, which reminds us of what for the moment we had forgotten, that Life has higher ends than the indulgence of our personal likes and dislikes, suspicious or contentions, or self-justifications—do we not know how such an holy incident will sweep away the swarm of vanities, the stifling cloud of inflamed feeling, a very multitude of offences, sweep it away and out of our path, and make it look a most sorry heap of moral rubbish, with which we are ashamed to have cumbered ourselves so long.

Thus Love covers sins by Forgiveness. I said it could also do this by prevention. I cannot in my thoughts dissociate St. Peter's use of the Jewish proverb from St. James' use of it, where he says that he that converts a sinner shall "save a soul from death and shall hide a multitude of sins." I believe St. Peter to be saying, like St. James, that love, true Christian love, which desires not its own righteousness only but that of the body, which is ready to strike at evil, as men would strike at a national enemy, whenever and wherever it invades the society, can be a preventer of sins. And this he asks of the brotherhood which owned him—they must prevent sins. Could he ask less? He saw the fire of judgment kindling afar: the time was short: the need terrible; men were content to think only of their own spiritual concerns when the cause of the many was being

lost by their neglect. That must not be. Up ! he cries, let your love be doing : let it make ready the guilty earth for its Lord's coming, and cover up the multitude of sins from the penal fire.

But *how* can Love prevent ?

Perhaps St. Peter was thinking how much of actual sin in any society need never have been if someone had done his duty in time. He had noted how timid and tentative are often the beginnings of infectious moral mischief, how dependent on early sympathy, how easily frowned down at the outset. He was thinking of furtive devil's whispers, speedily recalled or disowned if no answer comes back, or an indignant one ; of little neglected childish sins growing secretly strong ; of genial vanity, graceful wilfulness, hardening into a ruinous folly ; or petty boyish selfishness going unrebuked, and springing up in some full-statured ambition or inveterate greed. Here is a mass of evil which never need have grown larger than the seed. And Love, the love of man for man, could have prevented it growing. There is a period in the history of every evil influence when man's love can do more, incomparably more, than God's justice at a later period. The human will, it is a weak thing, lightly turned this way or the other, to holiness or to sin, by a light touch of warning or else temptation ; and there are times when the minds of the young or the weak seem as soft clay to be moulded thus or thus. " Men at some time are masters of their fates " ; at least, men at some time are masters of the fates of their brethren. Against the beginnings of sin God sets human love to keep watch and ward. Human zeal, human foresight, human truth, and human tenderness, these are enough to meet the danger before it has made head ;—afterwards divine judgment must

confront it ; a word, a look, a sign may turn a soul out of the wrong way to-day ;—to-morrow, what will turn him back ? Not the Angel of the Lord standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand ?

Such power has God given to human love. And power is duty.

But a duty, this one, how hard to render ! A matter of what patience, what discretion, what delicate perception and fineness of touch ! There are zealots who attempt it with little wisdom and less grace, with methods not certainly congruous with an Apostolic Church, and not convenient in a modern. Let us attempt what is reasonable. Let us ask that Love shall at least work within the circle of kinship or natural associations and sympathies—that brother shall not let brother sin unreprieved, nor friend forsake friendship's best office, nor parents from inobservance or timidity let their children walk on unwarned into the follies which break a life, or the impurities which stain it. But were there common among us love for the souls of others without these circles—love that is wise and steadfast and selfless and pure (for there is an impostor love which is none of all these), what a harvest of ill weeds would be stifled in their seed bed, what a multitude of sins be covered that now affront the light.

And the end of all things is at hand. Not indeed, perhaps in the flames of a near judgment dawn, as an Apostle deemed, but in a sense which will find motive for haste. The end of opportunity is always at hand. The friend to whom you daily meditate the word which you daily postpone for a more convenient season, may be, ere another Advent, carried from your side to a strange field of life on another continent ; the gracious daughter at your side may have

passed into another home or under its dawning influence, ere you have had time to press the seal you would upon the yielding nature ; the gallant boy, on whose head you look down in mingled pride and in fear, has found, while your better counsel procrastinates, the friend who leads him into life's experience by an evil gate, and, as you tarry, it has closed behind him against you. Aye, indeed, the end is always at hand. But there is time yet. Advent is always telling us that Christ is coming—not come. While time there is, while yet we are in some sort masters of the fates of others, let love do its best and swiftest. All too soon the night cometh when no man and no man's love can work.

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THE END.









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